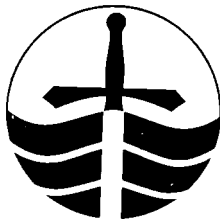




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AMERICAN LABOR  
IN MIDPASSAGE



# AMERICAN LABOR IN MIDPASSAGE

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BERT COCHRAN, Editor



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# FOREWORD

**T**HE post-World War II witch hunt has broken the tie of radicalism to the trade union movement. The consequences have been unfortunate for both sides. The unions have slid back into stultifying business unionism with the atmosphere of conformity becoming no less forbidding inside their organizations than in the society at large. And radicalism, deprived of one of its most important sources of strength, has been withering on the vine.

It will do no good simply to write off the labor unions, as some have been wont to do in recent years, and say that because of their dolorous record on the witch hunt, or cold war, or civil liberties, they are hopeless so far as providing dependable support for the pursuit of large social objectives in our society. If a meaningful movement for social advance is to be reintroduced into American public life, it can only be done by establishing a community of thought with at least some sections of the labor movement. A number of trade unions have given strong support to movements of the Left in past periods of American history and they will do so again once the political climate alters and a link is again forged between political dissenters and social-minded trade unionists.

Even in this age of television, there is power in the printed word. When this printed word dovetails with larger social drifts, it can again be an instrument in reshaping our social environment. Unfortunately, young intellectuals, who twenty years ago were intensely interested in the doings of labor unions and were instrumental in enlarging the horizons of many a unionist, have, for understandable

reasons, grown disillusioned with the labor movement, and turned their attention to other pursuits. The considerable literature on labor that is currently being issued by the university industrial relations divisions cannot fill the gap: it is either exclusively academic and grubbing in researches of small areas—a literature of, by, and for technicians; or, under an elaborate facade of supposed scientific neutrality, it is a rationalizer of the status quo.

It is our hope that this volume will be a contribution toward a growing analytical and critical literature on the labor movement which, as time goes on, will lead to a dialogue between unionists and political radicals and help create a new association of thought between the two. As in every compilation of this nature, the different essays contain varying nuances of belief. But there is an overriding unity which gives the volume an integrated character both of approach and purpose.

It was thought unnecessary to include a bibliography since a selective list of book references invariably tends to become little more than a duplicate of the many similar bibliographies already published in previous labor books. We want to call attention, however, to a number of comprehensive bibliographies that have been published by the universities in the past few years. *A Trade Union Library 1955*, issued by the Industrial Relations Section of Princeton University, is a useful miscellaneous reference work. *A Bibliography of American Labor Union History* by Maurice F. Neufeld, issued by the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University, is a good selection, especially of studies on individual unions. The Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations of the University of Illinois has published two excellent bibliographies: *History of Labor and Unionism in the United States*, and *Structure and Government of American Labor Unions*, the latter containing short abstracts of selected literature in the field. *Syllabus of Industrial Relations* by Harold L. Wilensky, published by the University of Chicago Press, will be found valuable for references to material in learned journals; while *A Decade of Industrial Relations Research 1946-1956*, edited by Neil W. Chamberlain, Frank C. Pierson, and Theresa Wolfson, published by Harper and Brothers, has good bibliographies of the literature of the past decade on union government, collective bargaining,

wage determination, labor economics, employee benefit plans, and labor movements abroad. *History and Theories of Working Class Movements* by Charles A. Gulick, Roy A. Ockert, and Raymond J. Wallace, published by the University of California, Berkeley, is an extensive bibliography of articles and documents appearing in journals and magazines covering a number of countries besides the United States.

BERT COCHRAN

*New York City*  
January 1959





# AMERICAN LABOR IN MIDPASSAGE

BY BERT COCHRAN

Behold, there come seven years of plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. And there shall arise after them seven years of famine.

*Genesis, XLI:29-30*

I

## 1. The Beneficent Fifties

IF in the golden twenties the American businessman machined the country down to his own Rotarian image, under whose watchful gaze college professors, newspaper editors, and the politicians of the vital center extolled the system's superlative virtues and pronounced the product good, what shall we say of the beneficent fifties, when the heights of one utopia after another have not only been scaled but secured? Where Thomas Nixon Carver saw the American economic revolution "making laborers their own capitalists" and "compelling the capitalists to become laborers," we have now entered with David Riesman into the cubistic Nirvana where all of us are members of an assorted middle class and where the rulers cannot be distinguished from the ruled. The "New Capitalism" has been replaced by "People's Capitalism," but the latter is every bit as potent as its predecessor in wholesale distribution of stock ownership among widows and orphans, in the shift of incomes in favor of the lower brackets,

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and in its crowning glory of permanent prosperity where unemployment and depressions are but relics of a vanished Americana alongside the buffalo and stagecoach.

In a sense, the orchestration of the twenties appears on the crude and naïve side compared to the atonal subtleties of our own day. Our fathers understood full well the technique of the Big Trumpet Blast, but they did not appreciate sufficiently the importance of indirection. They had not entirely grasped the corrosive power of sheer confusion. They had yet to learn the deadliness of intellectual jugglery. They were still in the Middle Period of the American Jubilee. But Freud, Max Weber, and Elmo Roper have not labored in the vineyard in vain. Our modern communications experts are now able to revive the casuistries of the medieval schoolmen with the garnishment of motivational research, depth psychology, and sampling techniques. The distance between the old *Collier's* and Luce's *Life* and *Time* is the distance between the old flickers and Todd-A-O.

The businessman's intellectual reconquest of America after World War II is a more remarkable achievement than was his reassertion of long-exercised power after World War I. The prosperity of Harding-Coolidge "normalcy" appeared a solidly based affair thoroughly grounded in time-honored principles of economics and finance and underwritten by the probity and business genius of our merchant princes. The swollen military establishment had been disbanded after the war. What was considered at that time a staggering war-time debt of \$25 billion was being slowly but surely reduced. The businessman's peaceful pursuits at home, rewarded by a golden geyser, found their counterpart in the quest for peace abroad as the necessary adjunct of Christian trade and investment. In the latter instance also, the good work was fittingly capped with the signing of the Kellogg-Briand Pact at the end of the twenties in which the major powers solemnly pledged to renounce war as an instrument of national policy. Certainly the boosters and promoters had some strong talking points.

For the success of the American Celebration of the fifties, greater tribute must be accorded to the sundry manufacturers of public opinion in both Washington and Madison Avenue. To be able to silence every voice of criticism, to stamp the occasional dissenter a pariah and cast him out of polite society, to grip the country with the compulsive rhythms of its tribal chant—after the Great Depres-

sion and World War II, in the midst of a cold war, and while the peoples cower in mortal fear of still another military explosion—surely that is the equal of any one of the Seven Wonders of the World. If not that, then it must rank as proof of the supremacy of power over thought, or the ability of power to bend a nation's thought to its own purposes.

While other countries are wracked with social tensions, and the moneyed classes of even Britain and West Germany must reckon with political opposition, the United States entrepreneur, emerged as the world empire builder, is the beneficiary of an internal unity and conformity that his predecessors in the twenties might well envy. Radicalism has for practical purposes disappeared. Liberalism has become but a state of nostalgia or inertia, where it has not been enlisted among the tom-tom drummers of anti-Communism and cold war. The intellectuals are working at good pay for the foundations, and the *avant-garde* has donned Ivy League clothes and secured teaching positions in the universities. Frederick Lewis Allen, the chronicler of the twenties, wrote that the bright young college graduate who in 1915 would have risked disinheritance to march in a socialist parade yawned at socialism in 1925, but was in revolt under the banner of H. L. Mencken against religion and puritan morality. In the fifties, the college graduate had been drained of all revolt and inoculated against any enthusiasms. He was a soft-spoken and conservatively dressed philistine.

How was the tide of the thirties reversed so successfully? The hucksters and scribes may have swollen in importance as the formulators of our opinions and the arbiters of our tastes. Nevertheless, big social trends do not originate in Madison Avenue, nor is the basic fabric of a social period woven out of slogans. The publicity men are important people, but as troubadours, not architects, of our society. As before, the decision-makers are the uncrowned nobility in control of our economic patrimony. They hated the New Deal and all through the thirties were resolved to turn the clock back. But vast impersonal forces had to be set into operation before they were able to mint their schemings into coin of the realm. The great war put their system back to work for them and transformed a discredited oligarchy into an honored elite. A system with a gross national product of around \$80 billion in the thirties came out of a war that ruined the

European powers, doing a business of over \$153 billion (in constant 1939 dollars).

Wage and salary workers were able to gather at the edges of this bounteous festival. They were permitted to work at fairly steady jobs and at hourly rates which improved their living standards by something like a half or better over what they had before the start of the war effort. But the boom of the fifties saw no resurrection of the hopes or illusions about the banishment of war. Bolshevism, which Winston Churchill had failed to strangle in the cradle after World War I, had grown into a lusty rival by the fifties. The spread of a hostile social system built up a garrison psychology among America's rulers leading to a witch hunt at home and a cold war abroad. The intrusion of a military state operating within the traditional institutional framework of a parliamentary democracy cowed dissent and frightened an already badly disoriented and shell-shocked people. At the time that the shibboleths of liberalism became the going currency of official declarations and the rationale of public policy, the old liberal perspectives had crumbled, the old watchwords were drained of content, the old signposts no longer carried conviction, the loyalties and alliances of the past were broken.

## 2. The Liberal Rationale

In the midst of the smashup of the radical Left and the liberal Left of Center, the trade union movement has stood up stalwartly, a tribute to the discipline and organizational staying power of the working people. Against the background of the failures of other reform movements, its achievements take on added hue. Even former critics have taken to praising the labor organizations, endorsing their leaders, and devising exegeses for their policies. The feeling has become widespread in liberal circles that while unions may lack the glitter of more radical intellectual bodies, their solid virtues of steadfastness and practicality, coupled with salutary caution and conservatism, have seen them through where the more mercurial have faltered and eventually vanished.

The existence of this immense labor movement is a fact and it is difficult to argue with facts. To add an equally unchallengeable saw, there is nothing in the whole world so persuasive as suc-

cess, and the union movement is undoubtedly an organizational success. Our admiration, however, is tempered by the knowledge that the unions' forward movement had to all intents and purposes ground to a stop five years ago, and that since the passage of the Taft-Hartley law, labor has been preoccupied with rear-guard actions. The labor movement's achievement of coming through trying times is likewise compromised by its ready adaptation to the rules of the game as laid down by the dominant business community. The labor leaders are not framers of decisions that determine the structure of this society. They are not initiators or consultants on national policies. They are not even dissenters in a decade of unexampled reaction. They have sought rather to become one of the components of the status quo in the hope that they would thereby be permitted to consolidate their organizations as a reward for good behavior.

The decade of labor retreat before triumphant reaction has been climaxed with the recent internal paroxysm over racketeering. This has made some wonder whether the labor movement is relaxing in the pause that refreshes preparatory for a new lunge ahead; or whether the present labor movement is already beset with the maladies of old age so that it lacks the resilience to face up to the challenges of a fast-moving age. Because "everybody" in the so-called liberal public knows that Walter Reuther and George Meany are "realists" and their policies the only reliable guides for the American labor movement is no more conclusive evidence of where labor is heading than was Selig Perlman's apotheosis of the Gompers tradition at the very time that the AFL was falling apart. There is a large class of people prone to worship power, and in the case of intellectuals, to ascribe to leaders of institutions a wisdom and foresight which they themselves are unaware of and, in any case, generally do not possess.

But leaders of an institution which has had some success are not disposed to dissect with a fine scalpel the different strands of their policies in order to determine scientifically the effectiveness of its several parts. The whole program tends to become frozen into a dogma upon whose continuance is supposed to depend the fate of the organization and the well-being of its membership. When conditions alter, the leaders, who matured in an earlier period and under a different set of conditions, resist desperately any shifts which will disturb their vested interests and ingrained habits of work. Thus is

created the overriding propensity to justify the present and to assume its indefinite continuation into the future.

To take an analogy of the past: Gompers' craft unionism represented a necessary stage of American trade unionism and its victory over the Knights of Labor was neither historic freak nor accident. But when some, because of this, sought to make of job consciousness, voluntarism, and no-politics, a holy trinity, and darkly insinuated that the slightest deviation could only be contemplated at the risk of imperiling the safety, welfare, and best interests of the workingman, they sought to freeze history at this given point and to transform a passing strategy which soon became outworn into a social absolute. It is therefore not surprising in the fifties when the voice of the philistine is again heard loud and self-confident in our land, that the practices of the bigger and more influential labor movement should have been converted into a new gospel the very questioning of which immediately stamps the interlocutor as deaf to the country's authentic rhythms.

And yet, trade union practices are so much the product of drift, inertia, catering to the lowest common denominator, reflexive actions to safeguard the bureaucratic machine, that labor leaders are often the least qualified people to discern changes in the environment and adapt their activities to new requirements. The ferocity with which the Hutchesons, Tobins, and Freys resisted the tide of the thirties strongly suggests that the labor bureaucrat as a social type is not well placed to practice the crafts of the disinterested social analyst and is often congenitally unsuited to disturb the rounds of his habitual routine. As a matter of fact, trade union philosophy, so-called, is such an unrefined mixture of taken-for-granted tradition, unexamined assumption, and pragmatic usage, liberally interlarded with public-relations bunkum and politician's blarney, that it takes a good bit of doing simply to disentangle with any degree of accuracy the actual practices and thinking of the labor unions as distinguished from their official rhetoric. The resolutions adopted at union conventions often bear the same relation to their activities as do the platforms of our two political parties. They are not totally unrelated, they often furnish invaluable clues to where the body may be hidden, but the social analyst who would take them at face value would place himself in the same category as the psychoanalyst who reconstructed a personal-

ity on the basis of the patient's appraisal of himself. As in other fields, an accurate image will not be gained through the sole use of photography or the labors of a Univac. Human reason is indispensable to synthesize the relevant data.

Union policy is dominated by a central contradiction. In practice, unions are distinct class organizations set up for the specific purpose of utilizing their bargaining power as a collectivity to force concessions like more wages and better conditions of work out of the employers. The struggle between the two is palpable whether it takes the form of strikes, the calling out of police, the securing of court injunctions, the violent barring of scabs from struck establishments; or whether the contest is pressed by means of a diplomatic tug-of-war at a well-appointed bargaining table with both sides engaged in friendly examination of statistical charts and consideration of comparative production costs—but where, as in all diplomatic encounters, there is the implicit threat of force if diplomacy fails. But just as nations never go to war for markets, raw materials, spheres of influence, and strategic territories, but invariably do battle only for democracy, freedom, and the rights of small nations, so unions are not class organizations designed to further the interests of their constituencies at the expense of the capitalist class, but are a supra-class or non-class “group” organized for the set purpose of joining with other “groups” to realize common aims. Far from there being an irrepressible conflict between labor and capital, there actually exists a confluence of interest between all “groups”: labor, management, the farmer, the professional, the banker, the consumer, the housewife. We have only to discover the underlying community of interests to ensure ready adjustments of conflicting claims among the “groups” and to guarantee harmony in the nation at large.

How account for the recurring warfare between workers and employers, and the savage assaults on unions by courts and legislatures? It would seem that the cause of the trouble lies in the existence of small groups of extremists who are intent on pursuing their own selfish interests at the expense of the community, or else that they are simply irresponsible, or are living in the past, or in the grip of outlived dogmas and are intent on upsetting the applecart of peace and harmony—which brawling is of benefit neither to themselves, nor their confreres, nor to the community at large. The

formula for industrial peace is therefore simple: all that is needed is for the spokesmen on both sides to understand the true situation. This will lead to mutual confidence, mutual trust, mutual respect, mutual appreciation of each other's point of view. Then, with good will, and mindful of the public trust and their obligations to the nation, no problem would resist solution.

There is a difference between the liberal rhetoric of the spokesmen of the nation-state and of the labor movement. No matter how intoxicated the former may become with the exuberance of their own eloquence, they never dare to deviate from the thin line of national self-interest, and they are held to strict accountability by powerful elites whose class instincts have been refined over centuries. Not so with the labor leaders. These cater to publics whose broad aims are ill-defined, poorly understood, and whose social concepts are often set by the dominant aristocracy. The labor leader, while usually a worker in social origin, and busying himself more or less exclusively with the demands of his working-class constituency, has personally ascended into the middle class. He enjoys a middle-class income, has opportunity to associate with middle-class people, and on his shoulders falls the full impact of an unfriendly public opinion of an essentially middle-class-thinking country. For the labor bureaucrat, the liberal rhetoric represents something more than just conventional cant designed to lubricate the wheels of labor's public relations. It is an essential of his innermost striving to get the labor movement accepted as part and parcel of the American social structure and to get himself accorded the status of an accredited professional in American public life. How much of the rhetoric he actually believes and how much of it he accepts in the way Napoleon accepted religion, even he himself probably does not know. In any case, apart from exceptional periods of social unrest, the force of the rationale has been irresistible in this country as it conforms to accepted mores and its vapid homilies blend in naturally with the main drift.

### 3. Working with the Community

The labor movement that issued out of the forges of the New Deal was considerably altered in size, structure, composition, and tensile strength from Gompers' setup. As the new unionism was a mass



affair and its activities could affect the life of the whole nation, its leaders quickly realized that they needed a broader social philosophy than had done duty for the old building trades business agent negotiating for a handful of mechanics. The vacuous middle-class rhetoric of the Progressive era, when given a dash of Social Democratic spicing, suited the requirements of the times perfectly and provided the right mixture of reformist high-mindedness and down-to-earth practicality. "We need labor organizations," said Philip Murray, "that will not merely advance the immediate interests of particular groups of labor, but will regard the interests of the industry as a whole, including the workers, and of the economic system." (Philip Murray and Morris L. Cooke, *Organized Labor and Production*, New York, 1940, p. 247.) The *AFL-CIO News* of September 20, 1958, reported a speech of George Meany at a luncheon gathering of the Greater New York Fund as follows:

Asserting that there is no such thing as a proletariat in this country, Meany pointed out that labor's concept of its part in community life involves its conviction that there are no class, religious or color lines dividing workers from other citizens. "Here in America we do not think in terms of separate classes. We consider ourselves an integral part of community life, and we seek progress with the rest of the community as it advances." He characterized the Greater New York Fund as a typical American activity that affects the lives of many millions of people.

Or, as it has been propounded in jet-age business executive jargon by Walter Reuther:

I think more and more it [the trade union movement] has to fight for economic policies that reflect the needs of our whole society . . . You take this profit-sharing idea. This has frightened a lot of people because they don't understand why we propose this. The profit-sharing idea was not a demand; it was a mechanism. In the profit-sharing scheme we're trying to find a rational means by which free labor and free management, sitting at the bargaining table, can attempt to work out in their relationship practical means by which you can equate the competing equities—in workers and stockholders and consumers. (*New Republic*, July 21, 1958.)

Beneath the sonorous rhetoric of the democratic community marching arm in arm toward the morning, the new crop of trade

unionists have inherited from the old an inner conviction that there is an overwhelming power in the community that can readily be arrayed against them, that the worker has only a limited loyalty to his union and its officials (shown by the extraordinary importance still attached to the closed shop, union shop, and check-off of dues), and that unions are only a minority force in the nation. "Working with the community" thus naturally gets translated into a hunt for alliances with liberals and so-called liberals on the make. These alliances are taken very seriously. They are presumed to take the curse off labor's exposed position, as the American public, according to the official dispensation, will not tolerate labor "domination." The alliances furthermore have allegedly surrounded labor with good friends without whose support it could not withstand the attacks of enemies or forge ahead.

The labor leaders saw in their most crucially formative years labor triumph over open shop citadels which had repulsed the efforts of previous generations of unionists, and, being unaccustomed to thinking in dialectical terms of action and interaction, they attributed the accomplishment to a benign government. They believe at one and the same time in the omnipotence of the government, while, in characteristic American fashion, holding that this same government can be manipulated by one side as well as the other, provided sufficient pressure is brought to bear. In any case, it was inevitable that as the unions grew big and important they would be pulled into the domain of government, first, as objects of regulation; then, through their own attempts to influence government in their direction. To balance themselves in the new circumstances, the labor leaders have attempted to extend their bargaining powers into the political field through the perfection of new organizational machinery. But they view themselves not as tribunes of an underdog class that has finally got itself reasonably well organized, but as upstarts who must prove their statesmanship to the established leaders of society. Above all, they must not frighten away potential allies in the liberal world by an appearance of intransigence or extremism. It was consequently written in the stars that the unions' political activity would find its expression at first through a bloc with the Democratic Party, or at least with a good part of its Northern and Western sections.

Labor's terms have been modest in the extreme. The Democratic politicians are permitted pretty much to write their own ticket on most matters. All they need do in return for labor support is to give backing, and often pretty equivocal backing, to a certain number of social welfare proposals, running from the mild to the innocuous, which the unions favor, and to oppose the cruder union-busting bills which periodically get introduced. When John L. Lewis, who as a personality is built along more heroic lines than the mine-run labor official, tried to force President Roosevelt into paying a somewhat higher price, a price which the European labor movements had exacted many years before, the other labor leaders threw up their hands in horror at the arrogance and presumption of their chief and promptly deserted him. William Green at the head of a crew of AFL and CIO officials turned up at the White House to demonstratively present a birthday cake to the President! In the face of a decade of mounting inflation, the labor leaders have still not raised their price. Their eyes are fixed on the goal of better organization at the precinct level, which they are convinced will sooner or later pay off and return them to the Eldorado of another New Deal.

The current crop of labor officials, particularly of the CIO, had another traumatic experience which has engraved itself indelibly on their minds. Many of them, it should be recalled, had intensive dealings with radicals in the unions' formative period. A number of them, truth to tell, have political backgrounds which could not withstand close scrutiny of the Congressional witch-hunt committees. These men have seen the most powerful radical movement of their time, the Communist, smashed like an eggshell, because it was found to be disloyal to this system and its institutions. Like the German Social Democrats who drew from Hitler's triumph the lesson that they must never again permit themselves to be outflanked on the front of nationalism and national loyalty, our present generation of labor officials has resolved that their patriotism must ever stand beyond reproach. They have interpreted this in extreme form so as to pass muster with preponderant segments of the conservative community. The result is that "People's Capitalism" is as safe with George Meany and Walter Reuther as the "New Capitalism" was with William Green and Matthew Woll.

There is something involved here that goes beyond the necessi-

ties of respectability and acclimatization to the dictates of official public opinion. The labor bureaucrat is a distinct social type. As he emerges fully from his previous incarnation of shop worker or craftsman, and establishes his new sets of relationships, he grows acutely conscious that his career rests upon the maintenance of the union, and that the union as it is presently constituted rests upon the market-place relationships which are known in uncouth circles as capitalism. The repeated avowals of labor leaders that they stand four-square for the private property system come straight from the heart. Naturally, they call for improvements. But they feel as deep an attachment to the system, to which their careers are tied, as does the broker to the stock market or the Texas millionaire to his oil well. Little wonder that in an era of unprecedented reaction, amid the trampling underfoot of traditional democratic liberties, the labor leader has enthusiastically taken his place in the ranks of the cold war armies and is battling Communism in the fifties with all the dedication with which Matthew Woll blazed the trail in the twenties. As a group of prominent labor officials phrased it in the Wilsonian language that is stylish today, "the fate of free institutions and the future of the labor movement are inseparable."

#### 4. The Administrative Virtues

American trade unionists have always prided themselves on their practicality. There is a long tradition of hostility to "ideology," which is equated with derailing the energies of the labor movement in favor of irrelevant, visionary schemes to the neglect of the workers' daily bread-and-butter needs. The labor bureaucrat does not see himself a plumed knight even in his most exalted flights of fancy. It stands to reason therefore that in his official mythology he has elevated to pre-eminence the administrative, not the martial, virtues. Sobriety, steadiness, fidelity to detail, efficiency in routine, smooth functioning, mastering the grievance machinery of the contract, small, regulated gains from year to year—this is the rock on which the labor movement is allegedly built and perseveres.

The living generations of labor officials are too close to the thirties to deny that the great breakthrough came out of a social explosion. But they tip their hats to this exception to their rule of

the "inevitability of gradualness" and "progress via administrative routine" in order to gloss over its meaning. They act in much the same way as liberal historians who are wont to incorporate inexplicable "breaks" such as revolutions and civil wars into their smooth-flowing narratives with the complacent implication that human intelligence has progressed sufficiently to avoid hereafter similar unreasonable and unruly manifestations.

One of the clichés of the labor leaders which by sheer force of repetition has attained the status of unassailable fact, is that labor's "heroic age" is now over. This is supposed to signify that while the "rabble rouser" may have been necessary twenty years ago in the frontier days of the new unionism, labor and capital have now matured to the point where they have learned to live with each other. Hence, with the arrival of the new age of reason, the talents of the agitator have become as obsolete as the skills of the green glass bottle blower with the introduction of the Owens automatic machine. The day of the flying squadron and the angry-voiced table pounder is past. The times call for the sober administrator, the smooth negotiator, the knowledgeable statistician, the genial lobbyist.\*

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\* David Dubinsky, recently addressing the graduating class at the ILGWU Institute declared: "Thirty years ago the important thing was for a union leader to know how to organize economic strength. Organize! Strike! Settle! That was labor-management relations. But today, with laws and labor boards, almost all of our problems are settled at the conference table, through negotiations. This requires new skills, a different kind of intelligence. Now, it is diplomacy instead of the big stick." (*Justice*, June 15, 1958.)

One of the union technicians, William Abbott, assistant education director of the AFL-CIO Rubber Union, is distinctly impatient with critical old-timers: "Today, conditions have changed. Labor must live with the contracts it has won. A union can't rouse its members to strike every time a worker has a grievance. There is a mutually agreed-to law of the plant, and the union must develop a sense of responsibility to live up to its agreements. Responsibility doesn't mean weakness or selling out to the NAM; it's a sign of maturity, a growing up which the old romantics might well ponder." (*The Progressive*, August 1958.)

Two labor statesmen out of the Steel Union formulate the matter as a law of organization: ". . . most militant local union leaders, who rise to the surface in the organization stage of unions, fall by the side when the union moves into the stage of constructive relations with management." (Clinton S. Golden and Harold J. Ruttenberg, *The Dynamics of Industrial Democracy*, New York, 1942, p. 58.)

A blood cousin to the philosophy of bureaucratism is opportunism. The glorification of the administrative arts goes hand in hand with the sanctification of the policy of drift. One of Gompers' better known dicta ran that the labor movement was built by tactics not ideals. This outlook was given its classic formulation by his friend, Adolph Strasser, who said: "We have no ultimate ends. We are going on from day to day." Of course, the present-day International Union is an elaborate, intricately graded, socially sensitive mechanism compared to the rather simple job organization of Strasser's Cigar Makers in the 1880s. But there is such a thing as the inner core of policy remaining the same while its externals undergo extravagant alterations. The Catholic Church has shown that it is possible to transplant authoritarianism from one to an altogether different social context by modifying practices and amending techniques. So, the modern unions have displayed an amazing ingenuity in adapting Gompers' opportunistic drift to modern times by introducing changes in the body while retaining much of the spirit.\*

Eugene Debs, the pioneer of industrial unionism, thought that whereas craft unions naturally preoccupied themselves with minimum trade standards, industrial unionism, based on a broader solidarity, would inevitably aim not only to ameliorate work conditions, but for the ultimate abolition of the existing system. In the founding days when the CIO took the field and the response to its call swelled into a blazing crusade, it appeared that the prophecies of the pioneers were to be fulfilled. John L. Lewis, who for twenty years before (and for twenty years since) had extolled the virtues of capitalism, was in 1937 hurling one thunderbolt after another at the "money trust" and the "invisible government." The cry for "industrial democracy" was in the air. But with the stabilization of the new unions and the signing of contracts, the tide ebbed. In but a few years after the start of the "CIO Revolution," the new outfits settled down to the practice of a more up-to-date and efficient business unionism.

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\* "Adhering to the precept of Samuel Gompers to emphasize economic action, U.S. unions have not consciously sought to change society; however, they have materially assisted in achieving fundamental transformations as a by-product of their economic action." (*Trade Unions and Democracy*, by James B. Carey, Clinton S. Golden, Eric Peterson *et al.*, Washington, D.C., 1957.)

This is a big social fact, too big to be explained in terms of the careerist bents of individual leaders or fortuitous sequences of events. The very uniformity of the process from union to union punctures all theories that seek to account for it by stressing this or that accidental concatenation of circumstances.

The fact is: when the mass movement raged, even conservative leaders talked radical, and when the mass movement declined, even the radicals adopted a facade of conservatism. Confronted with this commanding social phenomenon, we are called upon, in the maxim of Spinoza, not to laugh, nor to cry, but to understand. What does the uninspiring evolution of the CIO mean? Is business unionism the only labor program which fits the American scene and which over the long pull can elicit the support of great bodies of workers, so that no matter what its origins, or initial moods, the metal inevitably cools into a conservative mold? Or, is labor painstakingly, and more slowly than had been anticipated, treading the path from simpler to higher forms of solidarity and cooperation? Finally, does the history of the labor movement provide a reasonable set of clues to an inner logic in the line of development? Or, is the lesson of history that there is no lesson of history?

## II

### 5. Five Explosions

Union membership figures when analyzed in conjunction with strike statistics in the background of the initiating events furnish the most reliable data of the labor movement's development. The reasons are fairly clear. Large-scale union growth never takes place in isolation from large social events but is one of the components of a generalized labor surge. We want to review the history of the ebb and flow of unionism in an effort to find answers to our questions. We are passing over the early movements of the 1830s and the Civil War period as too far removed from the present, because the unions encompassed at that time relatively small numbers and America was a considerably different country; although, curiously enough, both movements followed oscillations similar to the later ones. If we set

the 1880s as the beginning of the modern labor movement, and go over the figures from that date to the present, we are immediately struck with a startling result: *The growth of American trade unions occurred in five brief explosions concentrated in relatively short periods of time against a background of major social upheavals brought on by depression or war.* A table of the five periods reads like this:

TABLE OF PERIODS OF RAPID UNION GROWTH\*

<i>Period</i>	<i>Years</i>	<i>Number of years</i>	<i>Approximate membership growth</i>
I	1884-1886	3	From 110,000 to 950,000
II	1897-1903	7	From 447,000 to 1,914,000
III	1917-1920	4	From 3,061,000 to 5,048,000
IV	1934-1938	5	From 3,609,000 to 8,000,000
V	1940-1943	4	From 8,500,000 to 13,500,000

The yearly percentages of growth in these five explosive periods were invariably of a different order of magnitude than in the so-called normal years, which could be described more accurately as either years of stagnation, recession, or at best consolidation and slow extension of the gains made in the periods of breakthrough. The gross figures are equally telling. Over a period of 70 years, 14 million

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\* The figures for the Knights of Labor are from the official membership tabulations of the Order quoted in Norman J. Ware, *The Labor Movement in the United States*, New York, 1929. The figure for the early trade unions is estimated by Selig Perlman in John R. Commons and Associates, *History of Labor in the United States*, Vol. II, New York, 1918. The figures for 1897 to 1934 are Leo Wolman's estimates in *Ebb and Flow in Trade Unionism*, New York, 1936. The figures from 1934 to 1943 are Florence Peterson's estimates in *American Labor Unions*, New York, 1952. In all subsequent references, figures from 1934 up to 1951 are those of Florence Peterson. For more recent years, the figures are from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.



members were enrolled in the five periods of social upheaval. Possibly five million were recruited in normal times, and the largest part of these are accounted for in the recent decade when the labor force has been expanding very rapidly.\*

The first period, called "The Great Upheaval" by the Commons historians, had all the earmarks of a social uprising. The rush into unions was of an intensity that had never been equalled up to that time and has never been exceeded since. From 1884 to 1886 the membership of the Knights of Labor rocketed from about 60,000 to 700,000, and the trade unions, most of which were soon to make up the AFL, shot up from roughly 50,000 to 250,000. An insignificant peripheral labor movement suddenly numbered a million members, a figure it was not to reach again until 1900. "The idea of solidarity of labor ceased to be merely verbal, and took on flesh and life; general strikes, sympathetic strikes, nation-wide boycotts, and nation-wide political movements became the order of the day. . . . The movement bore in every way the aspect of a social war. A frenzied hatred of labor for capital was shown in every important strike." (Commons, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 357, 374.)

The resentment had been building up during the depression of 1883-1885 when workers, already on the borderline of hunger, suffered sharp wage cuts and were lashed by extensive unemployment. Then, as is most commonly the case, with the first signs of upturn, the workers' renewed self-confidence fused with their bitter memories to erupt as a volcano of social passion. The unskilled and semi-skilled were swept into the elemental movement even more than the skilled trade unionists, and the tide rose menacingly until the grand push for the eight-hour day was smashed on the rock of the Haymarket affair. The tide then spilled over into a political revolt. Labor parties sprang up throughout the country and made surprising showings. Henry George in New York was possibly elected but counted out. In Chicago, where the community had been fanned into a frenzy of hate, the labor candidates polled better than a quarter of the total vote with a state senator and several assemblymen being elected. Other candidates were elected in a scatter of cities throughout the

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\* See Table I, Irving Bernstein, "Growth of American Unions" *American Economic Review*, June 1954.

nation. John Swinton noted in his paper that one demonstration of independent labor strength had brought more results than years of "balance of power" politics.

The second period of upheaval came like the first in the wake of a depression, possibly the most cruel, outside of the 1930s, of the past three quarters of a century. Factory jobs fell by almost a fifth between April and September 1893. At the end of the year *Brad-streets'* reported three million out of work. As there was no state system of relief, the jobless were dependent on charitable institutions, the municipalities, and private sources. Huge unemployed meetings of protest took place in major cities and culminated in General Coxey's march on Washington the following year. As in the depths of the previous depression, labor suffered crushing defeats in its defensive strikes, notably the attempt of the bituminous miners in 1894 to halt wage cuts, and the Pullman general strike, or as it was dubbed by the newspapers of the time, "Debs' Rebellion," likewise started by Pullman's unconscionable slashing of his workers' pay envelopes. The tide of discontent was rising in the countryside as well as in the cities, with the Populist revolt coming both to its climax and abortion after its submergence in the Democratic Party and the capture of the latter by the Bryan insurgents.

The business improvement that started in 1897 swelled into a boom with the Spanish-American War. This in turn set off a price inflation. With weekly hours in excess of 59 and yearly wages averaging roughly \$400, labor discontent was at a white heat. The social climate veered sharply to the left as liberal-minded people were shocked at the callousness of the money barons to widespread suffering, and concerned about the future of the Republic in the face of their growing irresponsible power. The Progressive Era was set in motion with the nation rocking to muckrakers' exposés and the election to high office of idealistic liberals like "Golden Rule" Jones, Tom Johnson, and Robert La Follette.

Within a few months after business lifted in 1897, workers began pouring into unions and the strike curve rose precipitately. Inaugurated with the notable victory of 200,000 coal miners called "The spontaneous uprising of an enslaved people," the strike wave swept on, involving the steel industry in 1901, the San Francisco general strike of the same year, the great anthracite stoppage of 1902, and

the violent battles in the Western metal mines which blew up into a veritable civil war around Cripple Creek, Colorado.

The upsurge continued despite labor's bad defeat in 1901 at the hands of the steel trust, and was only stopped three years later by the employers' massive counter-offensive which the Commons history notes "stopped unionism in its tracks." The pendulum then began swinging back. The new climate was epitomized by Charles W. Eliot, President of Harvard University, publicly ranging himself on the side of the strikebreaker whom he called an "American hero."

The third period of insurgency was initiated not by depression but by war. Under this gargantuan head of steam, the economy frantically leaped forward and prices doubled from 1916 to 1920. With five million recruited into the armed forces and immigration down to a quarter of the prewar level, labor was in short supply and anxious to take advantage of the extraordinary circumstances to raise its wages and force the employers to deal with unions. A swift influx into unions was again under way. Taking advantage of the need for national unity, unions managed to infiltrate into hitherto sacrosanct open-shop domains in railroading, shipbuilding, marine transport, meat packing, lumber, munitions, textiles. As soon as the armistice was signed the stage was set for the greatest strike wave in American history.

The labor ranks were in a state of high militancy, spurred on by the widening gulf between soaring living costs and lagging wages. The workers were further stirred by the dashing of the exalted hopes that had been implanted in them by wartime propaganda. With their new-found organization strength, and excited by radical news from abroad, they sought to realize their wartime expectations of an improved status for labor and recognition of their organizations. The employers, on the other hand, were all set, now that the war was over, to push unionism out of their industries and return to the good old *status quo ante*. They proceeded to utilize the apparatus that had been created to marshal public opinion behind the war as a battering ram to extirpate the labor movement. Nineteen-nineteen was the year of decision. A strike wave unprecedented in its scope swept the country. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported 4,160,000 workers, a fifth of all employees, participating that year, with the wave not finally spent until the defeat of the rail shopmen's strike in 1922. The AFL

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proved unequal to the contest and was forced out of most of its recently won positions. The short depression that set in in 1921 completed the work of demoralization. The "American Plan" ruled the roost for the remainder of the twenties.

The fourth period, during the New Deal, was the biggest labor explosion in American history. While following the classic lines of the 1886 and 1893 movements, everything occurred on an enlarged scale, from the catastrophic plunge of the economy to the ferocity of the labor riposte with the first signs of an upturn. The popular revulsion against business leadership was of quasi-revolutionary intensity and the country lifted to the seat of government the most liberal administration heretofore seen. Moreover, seething around the commanding figure of Roosevelt were a variegated array of radical organizations ranging the length of the political spectrum, from Huey Long's and Father Coughlin's to Technocracy and Dr. Townsend's Old Age Pension movement. On the far Left, the Communists were making inroads into various reaches of American society.

The revolt rose in two successive waves. In the second, the labor legions brought the autocrats of industry to terms in a swirl of violent battles. The unions did not grow but erupted. The AFL leaders who at first thought to ride out the storm hurriedly modified some of their practices after 1937 lest they be engulfed. The country had never seen the working class united in such fighting formations and stood awestruck at the display of offensive power. The American trusts which had successfully repulsed all challenges for half a century finally succumbed. The scale and intensity of the attack dwarfed all previous ones, and the achievements cast into the shade those of the past. Unionism came out of the fray a social power and a mass movement. The social topography of the country underwent drastic alteration along welfare-statist lines so that a decade of subsequent reaction has not effaced many of the landmarks.

The final period of our table covering World War II resembles the World War I period to the extent that union expansion was tied directly to the dislocations and tensions set off by the war. But the unions now carried a bigger stick and spoke more bellicosely, as well. They could consequently excite more attention and strike better bargains.

When this country turned itself into the "arsenal of democracy"

and went into war production in 1940, unemployment was finally eliminated for the first time since 1929. At last America found a way to put its enormous productive apparatus to work. Industrial production skyrocketed 130 percent between 1939 and 1944. As soon as the factories started humming, a new organization and strike wave got started, and it seemed as if the CIO was about to resume its forward march after the lull of the 1937 depression and the defeat in Little Steel. Huge strikes quickly induced Ford and the holdout steel companies to sign up while similar battles were looming in many of the other war production industries. The government moved rapidly to perfect its control machinery, and after Pearl Harbor most of the union advances went through the rigidly prescribed channels of the War Labor Board.

But the eight-million man army that marched into the World War II period was extraordinarily virile and kept prodding its leaders with many unauthorized strikes and occasional insurgent movements. Outside of coal, these were all quickly stamped out with the active cooperation of the union heads, but they kept the latter hopping. Between 1940 and 1943, the unions swept an additional five million members into the fold. By taking advantage of the stringent labor market and the overwhelming pressure for the maintenance of uninterrupted production, labor was able to squeeze out sizable wage increases, at least compared with the past. Steady employment and overtime hours created yearly earnings that represented a material betterment of the traditional living standard.

With the end of the war, labor feared it was going to be shoved back to the bad old days. Hours were immediately cut back to forty a week. The average manufacturing worker who had been earning \$46.35 in June was drawing \$35.60 in September. Millions who had been upgraded to more skilled and better paying jobs were now downgraded to their pre-war classifications. Inflation was gathering momentum, and one month after V-J Day two million workers were unemployed. The signs looked ominous. The chilling realization that the immense sacrifice of blood and treasure was going to lead to no changes in the country's social setup heightened the unrest, which found expression in a spread of strikes. In 1946 the number of strikers rose to 4,600,000 or 14½ percent of all workers. The demand was for a 30-percent wage increase to maintain the previous take-

home pay. This time the employers could not duplicate their performance of 25 years earlier. The few experimental attempts to break strikes were answered with general strikes in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and Stamford, Connecticut. The result was to establish a generally peaceful pattern for the strike movement. Some of the walkouts were fairly lengthy; the General Motors strike lasted almost four months. But in the end, labor won an 18½-cent hourly wage increase—an impressive victory. It was another year before the employers were able to turn the tables, and then it was by means of a legislative attack.

These five periods lend themselves to the generalization that unionism is a product of social revolt, not of bureaucratic effort. Union growth has been a derivative of mass insurgency, not slow accretion. The business agent can be considered the beneficiary, not the initiator of union growth. He administers and sometimes consolidates the achievements. He does not create them. Every one of the periods of growth was a period of social crisis. While the objectives of the struggles were of a limited reform character, through every one of the upheavals ran a heavy undertone of radicalism which shaped to one extent or another the temper of the uprising, and which inspired some sections of the movement with more extreme aims.

The crises of 1886, of 1920, and of 1936 gave rise to labor parties. In the 1897-1903 period, Laborite-Populist currents merged into the Socialist. In the New Deal, a serious Communist movement arose. Only in the World War II period was the surge of militancy confined generally to the union sphere, expressed in the opposition to the no-strike pledge in a number of CIO unions and culminating in the strike wave after the war. The absence of political radicalism in this last period was probably due to an exceptional cause unlikely ever to recur in American labor history. The dominant radical organization of the time was the Communist Party. As a reflector of Russian policy, it was throughout the war years in a head-on clash with every manifestation of labor militancy rather than the promoter of it. The surge of dissatisfaction was consequently dammed up in exclusively trade union channels and deprived of its traditionally most resolute radical leaders—in contrast to every one of the preceding periods of extraordinary labor growth.

The years between these five explosive periods account for a very small part of the growth of total union membership. After 1886, the Knights rapidly collapsed while the AFL and independent national unions grew slightly, with probably a good part of their new memberships coming from the adhesion of groups formally attached to the Knights. When the next explosion occurred, the movement started from a plateau of less than half the membership of its 1886 peak. After the second wave had passed, the labor movement registered hardly any growth until 1910, and then only a slow crawl upwards until the war period beginning with 1917 sent the figures ripping to their all time pre-New Deal high of 5 million. Over 70 percent of the growth of 800,000 during the ten-year period from 1903 to 1913 was likewise bunched into the short space from 1910 to 1913 when the Progressive movement was at its climactic point, and when the sensational victory of the IWW in the Lawrence strike appeared to presage a new organization wave of the unskilled similar to the uprising of the eighties—a wave which probably got washed away because of this country's rapid industrial expansion as it became the workshop and banker of its European allies. The next period after 1920 was one of labor recession which by the middle of the twenties turned into disintegration. By 1933 the unions had slumped to below the three-million mark.

Gompers' business unionism had not broken the previous tie of the labor movement to the social cycle. It had not substituted growth by organization routine for the elemental heavings of the earlier days. What Gompers had accomplished was the stabilization of the penetrations effected during the high points of social stress so that the unions could survive and persevere in bad times of economic depression or political reaction. Organization stabilization should not be confused with social stabilization. But organization stabilization was a *tour de force* and is the watershed marking off the Gompers movement from that of the past. Before him, the trade unions of the 1830s were wiped out in the depression of 1837; the trade unions of the Civil War period scarcely survived the hard days of 1873; the Knights of Labor disappeared after 1890. The AFL broke this aspect of the cycle by weathering the depression of 1893 and establishing a *continuous* organization. But after Gompers, as before him, growth was negligible between the periods of insurgency.

The CIO, heavily concentrated in the mass production industries, has been even more intimately linked to the social ups and downs. Its formation was almost synonymous with the uprising of the thirties. It was able to bring into the fold the major holdouts of the first drive, like Ford and Little Steel, not by simple extension, but in the short wave that preceded Pearl Harbor. Its next period of growth, like that of the AFL, came in the war years. The one conceivable exception to this rule is the recent decade, when labor has grown in the midst of social passivity and political reaction. But actually the curve is about the same as in the previous decades.

The approximate three million gain in membership between 1947 and 1956 in the teeth of the Taft-Hartley law is substantial as a gross figure and can be accounted for only by the stronger attractive power inherent in this big mass as compared to past unionism. Analogous to the AFL's ability, by its perfection of stable organization, to transcend the old cycle of the 1830s and 1860s when unions would sprout in good times and disappear in depressions, the present movement, better entrenched and disposing of larger assets, has been able to bulge by sheer bureaucratic encroachment even in a period of reaction. It operated almost in accordance with the laws of Newtonian mechanics. But the rhythm of the past has persisted, given the greater amplitude of this larger body's movements. Its rate of growth has slid precipitately downward from the New Deal and war periods to about the rate of growth of the AFL from 1904 to 1916; unionism has entered no new fields; and its "real" membership, that is, as a percentage of either the civilian labor force or wage and salary earners, has remained roughly stationary.

## 6. The Search for a Theory

John R. Commons was the first to try to formulate a general law which would explain the motive causes behind labor's ebbs and flows. He concluded that the movement of wholesale prices was the clue to labor's oscillations and that the cycle was being consistently repeated. His well-known generalization reads that in "periods of rising prices, when the cost of living was outleaping the rise of wages, when business was prosperous and labor in demand, then aggressive strikes, trade unionism, class struggle, suddenly spread over the industrial



sections of the country. At the other extreme, in the periods of falling prices, with their depression of business and distress by unemployment, labor, in its helplessness and failure of defensive strikes, has turned to politics, panaceas, or schemes of universal reform, while class struggle has dissolved in humanitarianism." (Commons, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 11.)

Writing in the midst of the depression of the thirties, Commons gave the thought a more apocalyptic turn in his article on the labor movement in the *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*: "The two goals which divide labor movements are displacement of capitalism and bargaining with capitalism . . . . In periods of rising prices, of increasing profits and growing demand for labor, bargaining with capitalism predominates . . . . In periods of falling prices, of decreasing profits and unemployment, the displacement of capitalism predominates as the goal . . . . Political activity, Communist agitation and quasi-revolutionary strikes replace the 'business' strikes of unionism."

The idea is obviously a useful one and adequately covers some situations. But as a sweeping generalization, it will not stand up, not for the earlier movements, and even less for the recent. The 1886 labor offensive, occurring at the start of an upturn, saw the spread of aggressive strikes and with their defeat immediately passed over to a political offensive—all in a period of upturn. With the strengthening of the modern labor movement, the rhythms become even more complex and the interactions more involved. As a continuing institution, unions exert a larger influence in channelizing the chaotic social gyrations. Consequently, the relationship between labor's social actions and the economic cycle, which never proceeded along lines of a crude economic determinism, have become more devious, with a greater criss-crossing of connecting strands.

For example, in 1922-1924, a period of economic boom, the unions were stagnating, but labor-party politics was on the ascendant. Again in 1936, a period of economic rise (although unemployment remained high), the aggressive strike movement was paralleled with aggressive political forays as well as the rise of extreme radicalism. To determine the reasons for these several developments, it is necessary to analyze in their dynamic unfoldment the reciprocal influences of economic conditions, workers' moods, status of their or-

ganizations, character of their leaders, political climate. The dialectical interaction accounts for the main trend. Commons started with a valuable germ of an idea, but it has to be stripped of its crude economism (which Marx would never have countenanced) and enriched with an appreciation of the complex reciprocities which go into determining the rhythm of social events.

Irving Bernstein, repelled by this kind of oversimplified economism, has gone to the opposite extreme. Relying on statistical hocus-pocus, he has concluded that "union membership falls outside the ambit of the business cycle." (*American Economic Review*, June, 1954, p. 313.) In leaping out of the frying pan of straight-line determinism, he has fallen into the fire of Hoxie's undifferentiated pluralism. (R. F. Hoxie, *Trade Unionism in the United States*, New York, 1921.) A complex social process consequently has gotten reduced to a listing of unevaluated and disconnected "factors." However, Bernstein has made a valuable contribution by classifying Commons' periods of labor upsurge and trying to determine their relation to the complex of social and economic events.

The American experience definitely reveals a tendency toward large scale strike activity at the beginning of economic upturn following major depressions. The upsurge has its origins in the accumulation of grievances in the course of the depression. But the masses are then too demoralized for offensive actions. Those that have jobs are fearful of jeopardizing them, while the few defensive strikes against wage cuts are more often lost than won. At the same time, a certain division occurs between the unemployed and employed, reducing the possibilities for coordinated efforts. With the beginning of business recovery as the jobless get called back, self-confidence is restored and the gnawing humiliations but recently endured are transmuted into a movement of protest. At any rate, such has been the course of the cycle in the past century. Developments in Western Europe have followed roughly similar paths, although at times modified because of the existence of powerful labor parties. The tendency can apparently be effaced completely only in the face of the virtual breakdown of a social order, as in the case of Germany in 1918. In such an instance, the mass tide is so overwhelming as to free itself for the moment from any dependence on the economic cycle.

In the case of the horrendous dislocations issuing from the two mass wars of modern times, both produced upsurges which came at the conclusion of the war and both were related to profound complexes of desires for improved status and retention of gains made. The upsurge was violent and bitter after World War I because the opposition was savage. The upsurge subsided rather rapidly after the recent war because it won concessions and thought its positions had been secured. Economic troubles were not the only or even the main explanation for the tensions. There were difficulties, it is true, because of rationing, war shortages, lack of housing facilities, price inflation. But it was not these alone that accounted for the waves of unrest. It was above all the break-up of the normal flow of life. Vast armies of humanity were suddenly uprooted from their traditional associations and forcibly transplanted to foreign and inhospitable soils. Dear ones were being drafted for the battlefields. Long standing values were suddenly called into question. Stability and tradition seemed to crumble into dust in the general paroxysm of society. In times of peace, millionaires had excited envy or had been casually accepted as a normal end-product of competitive capitalism. But the coining of fortunes out of the blood and agony of a nation excited contempt and indignation. As soon as the war pressure for national unity eased, the accumulated dissatisfactions erupted.

In a word, any ruthless tearing up of the customary routine, whether because of depression or war, by hunger or uprootment, releases vast dissatisfactions that ever lie latent beneath the surface. The irrationality of the ordering of man's existence in a discriminatory class society suddenly looms provocatively large in these periods and quickens the impulse for change.

The precise paths that the upsurge follows, whether it pursues economic or political objectives or both, or trade union or anti-capitalist objectives or both, depend on labor's outlook, ambitions, morale, consciousness, the support it enjoys from other sections of the population, as well as on the strength of the opposition it faces. There is no single formula which can explain universally why some struggles succeed and some fail, why some are restricted to trade unionism and some expand into more all-sided crusades, why sometimes labor takes to politics after it is thwarted in the economic field and at other times lapses into passivity and discouragement, or why at still

other times it undertakes both simultaneously. The hunt for one theoretical key which will unlock all doors is bound to be abortive. These multifarious responses can only be explained by specific analysis. What can guide and illumine the analysis is a class theory of history which satisfactorily delineates the motive forces creating these tensions and conflicts and can illumine the broad trend of dynamic development.

Where the pluralists go astray is not in some of their specific insights but in their failure to comprehend that without a guiding theory, the analyst has no thread on which to hang his beads of research. As Russell S. Bauder confessed at a meeting of the Industrial Relations Research Association, "One of the great difficulties in trying to frame research projects is that we start with no theory, and end with no theory, and hence find ourselves only with an accumulation of data which we do not know how to use." (IRRA, *Proceedings*, 1950, p. 171.)

## 7. Triumph of Business Unionism

The labor story is one of union growth as a consequence of militant struggles in the course of social upheavals. This towering proposition stands at variance with the official historiography of laborism. But there is another towering proposition: after every upsurge the labor organizations settle down to business unionism. Radicals, who are welcome during the short, heroic bursts, are discarded and often execrated as soon as the unions garner bargaining rights and seek to nail down their small advantages. This has happened not once but over and over again. The old sets of radical leaders, like Martin Irons, head of the Gould Southwest rail strike in 1885, or the insurgents heading the huge outlaw strikes of the early 1920s, badly miscalculated the extent of their support, were defeated by superior force—and eased out in favor of a more conservative crew. But the evolution of the CIO officialdom tells the story more impressively. For here was an insurgent movement that was not defeated and dispersed, but triumphant. Here were many radical leaders who were not eased out after the initial battles but managed to emerge as the officials of the consolidated organizations. Their metamorphosis into

a more socially sophisticated but nonetheless authentic breed of business unionist administrators, paralleling on a national scale the evolution of the Socialist clothing union leaders in the twenties, is compelling evidence that, regardless of their initial ideologies, unions have exhibited a tropistic response to the atmospheric pressures in American society. It has lent plausibility to the smug assurance that there is nothing so effective as burdening a person with a little responsibility to cure him of his radicalism. It is true that some high labor officials have resisted the conservatizing trend, but it is also true that these officials have not survived.

We have no need to follow recent fashionable writers in their hunt for metaphysical or occult explanations for this American exceptionalism. The explanations that have already been worked out—centering around the lushness of the country, the relative class mobility, the waves of immigration and heterogeneity of the population, the weakness of class consciousness—adequately cover the case. No new explanations are necessary. Indeed, they cannot be found. In the early movement of the 1830s, the employers often argued against shorter hours or other improvements by explaining that it was not in their employees' true interests to make such demands since the journeymen would soon be setting up shops of their own and would consequently be burdened with uneconomic costs. Until well past the Civil War period, the labor movement could not build stable unions because the mechanics thought their situation to be a transient one. William H. Sylvis, the greatest labor leader of his time, was an exemplar of resourcefulness and indefatigability in building his Molders Union and responsible for the organization of many other unions. But he believed that trade unions were only temporary protective devices whose more important purpose was the setting up of producers' cooperatives to beat the wage system.

American labor history has been one of the most violent of the whole world. Goaded beyond endurance, workers would rise up every fifteen to twenty years. But the system was never in danger. The variegated composition of the American people ensured that the uprising affected but a segment of the nation. The growth of the middle classes stunted the numerous labor parties that repeatedly dotted the landscape. The extreme left organizations were kept to small minority affairs. The stormy expansion of American capitalism,

thwarted by no feudalistic obstructions, and with a virgin continent to ravage, permitted the doling out of material privileges. The mass movement, in defeat or victory, would inevitably lapse into acquiescence.

It was only as late as 1890 that the labor movement could free itself from the allure of middle-class panaceas. The workers had to experiment with countless cooperative, money, and single-tax schemes before they were ready for the hard-headed message of Sam Gompers. It is ironical that the carriers of this hundred-percent American trade union gospel should have been ex-Marxian socialists, a number of them immigrants who derived from Marx their ideas about the inevitability of capitalist development and the impossibility of circumventing the wage system through cooperative self-employment ventures or anti-monopolist crusades, and who carried over from their socialist days the doctrine of class divisions and class interests. It is not the first time in the record of history that the outsider displays a keener sensitivity than the insider to the deep-going trends of a society.

With the AFL we first had a clearly defined class organization with specific class purposes. But in resting upon the most conscious and disciplined section of the working class of the time—the skilled craftsmen—the organization brought into the labor movement, in addition to continuity and stability, the inevitable conservatism associated with the labor aristocracy. The American craftsman was more labor conscious than the generality of the labor mass, but his consciousness was of the narrow job variety far removed from the Marxist vision of a labor solidarity crossing the barriers of parochial trade and shop limitations. The outlook of the craftsmen produced pure-and-simple trade unionism, not Marxian laborism.

The years from 1890 to 1930 when the AFL dominated the labor scene were the very years in which the premises of craft unionism were being systematically undermined. Enormous capital accumulations confronted the badly divided craft unions with formidable trusts and combines that they could not successfully cope with. The harnessing of science by the emergent economic behemoths progressively revolutionized technology and destroyed old skills based upon a simpler division of labor. The restricted kingdoms founded on trade jurisdiction, protecting the fortunate few through closed shop ar-

rangements, became a unionism restricted to the interstices and certain traditional preserves in the system, with the largest part of the working class left out of the game. The growing trustification of the economy narrowed opportunities for newcomers and reduced mobility on even the lowest levels. This remained the wealthiest capitalism with the highest living standards. But the process of "Europeanization" was far advanced.

It took the working class several decades to attune its mentality to the new facts and to perfect organizations able to do something about them. An oppressed class can generally respond to social stimuli only after a considerable time interval when the same needs are evoked in one after another layer of the people and lead to a common solidarity of purpose. A vast conglomeration of humanity can create organizations and produce leaders to deal intelligently with a complex social mechanism only after repeated trials and errors. But new techniques were finally devised, new organizations built, and new leaders came up and grappled with the new realities of the giant corporation and the assembly line. And as we know, the heroism and daring of the thirties gave birth to superb mass organizations—which soon went in for a more grandiose variety of business unionism!

We are far from the belief that leaders invariably interpret accurately the wishes of the ranks. The relationship between the two is an infinitely complicated one. There are times when a leadership breaks off its dialogue with the ranks, and because of the difficulties in breaking through any bureaucratic mesh, and the time-lag and inertia in human affairs, there may be a lapse of years before the ranks can right the imbalance. But the relapse into business unionism was not a case of that kind. Given the mentality of the American labor mass, it was as inevitable as Gompers' triumph in 1890.

## 8. Consciousness of Kind

Where does that leave the socialist dream? According to Daniel Bell and a thousand others, it leaves it in the ditch:

In American radical folklore, the auto worker was considered the seedling of the indigenous class conscious radical—if there ever was to be one in America. Uninhibited, rootless

(many were recruited from the Ozark hills), with his almost nihilistic temper he was the raw stuff for revolutionary sentiment—once he realized (or so the Marxists thought) that he was trapped by his job. Few auto workers today have a future beyond their job. Few have a chance of social advancement. But they are not radical. What has happened is that the old goals have been displaced and the American Dream has been given a new gloss. . . . A worker sees himself “getting ahead” . . . not by promotion in the plant—he knows that *that* ladder has vanished, even though Henry Ford and Walter P. Chrysler began from the mechanics’ bench—but because he is working toward a “nice little modern house” . . . dissatisfactions on the job lead not to militancy, despite occasional sporadic outbursts, but to escapist fantasies. . . . (Daniel Bell, *Work and Its Discontents*, Boston, 1956, pp. 32-33.)

None of this is untrue and yet it provides but a surface view of what is taking place. A static view encompasses but one side of a complex social reality and is therefore an inadequate view. Anti-Marxists are after all no more entitled than Marxists to ignore the dynamic flow, to assume that time has stopped with them. Conservative the working class certainly is—but there is conservatism and conservatism. It would be fatuous to compare the working class of 1950 with that of 1910 and pretend that nothing has changed except a few frills and superficialities; or to maintain that it is still in the grip of a slightly altered American Dream. As a matter of fact, Ely Chinoy’s very study of the automobile worker that Bell uses to make his case, explodes the thesis.

The fact that workers are interested in having a “nice little modern house” does not prove very much one way or the other—except possibly that sinful man thirsts for material things and is avid for creature comforts. Greater insight would be gained by analyzing what social relations he establishes and what lines of conduct he embarks on in order to get his little house. The wide acceptance of unionism as a natural and necessary feature of the working man’s life; the forging of an authentic labor bloc in politics; the fatalistic acceptance by the generality of workers of their class position on the social ladder and the effort to make the best of the bargain *as a workingman*; the cohesiveness, discipline, and stability of labor’s mass organizations over a period of twenty years—these are sure symptoms of a deep-rooted labor consciousness transcending by far the



Gompers job consciousness of limited groups of skilled mechanics, or the evanescent bursts of militancy of a swirling, chaotic mass which would sink into exhaustion and demoralization as rapidly as it had flared into rebellion. This "consciousness of kind," as J. B. S. Hardman has shrewdly defined it, uncannily resembles what socialists have traditionally meant by "class consciousness" in its appreciation of labor's common interests and the need for solidarity of action for self-protection and self-advancement. But it is far removed from the Marxian notion in its other half: its acceptance of the liberal rationale as a correct image of the existing social machinery and as an acceptable philosophy to guide labor's progress.

From the point of view of Marxian anticipations and ambitions, this is a very disappointing state of affairs, as labor seems to be largely wasting the huge powers inherent in its organizations, and is not much of a mover and shaker in the ordering of the national weal. Considered as a class that has been anointed with the holy petroleum to reorganize society, American labor makes a decidedly uninspiring appearance at present. But from the viewpoint of a submerged and deprived class, which until the CIO days was never permitted to enter the nation's parlor even if it was somewhat better fed down in the kitchen than its fellow menials of other lands, it may appear as if some appreciable progress has been made. If we can grasp the dynamics of the process, this will give us a better insight than any amount of fussing over the exact formulations which pinpoint most accurately labor's current outlook, or more correctly, its apathy.

In his earlier more fruitful days, Frank Tannenbaum explained that the labor movement is the reaction to industrial society (*The Labor Movement, Its Conservative Functions and Social Consequences*, New York, 1921, p. 32): The machine threatens the security of the individual worker and he reacts in self-defense. Through a union he tries to control the machine and stem the tide of insecurity which menaces his life. He is seeking little more when he joins a union, but "in the process of carrying out the implications of defense against the competitive character of the capitalist system he contributes to the rebuilding of present-day society—a contribution which represents a by-product of the more immediate and conscious attempt to find security in an insecure world." Tannenbaum, when he

wrote this book, thought that the ultimate displacement of capitalism by "industrial democracy" was "implicit in the growth and development of the organized labor movement."

Students of the labor movement will attest to the cogency of at least the first part of Tannenbaum's observations. The labor movement reflects—at times more accurately, at times less accurately, but generally speaking with a measure of fidelity—the aspirations, going moods, wills and wishes of its individual members. But like all mass movements it is more than the arithmetical sum of its individual parts. The consciousness of power, the electrifying action of one part upon the other, gives the movement a corporative character with horizons and aspirations greater than those of its individual human atoms. The accumulation of actions in the contest with capital have a logic that goes beyond its avowed aims and carries a momentum that is sometimes of greater significance than the conscious designs of its architects. If it is true generally in the social sphere that things take place behind people's backs, it is doubly true in the case of the labor movement. For the labor movement operates with a formal ideology that is at loggerheads with its own practices.

Sophisticated conservatives understand this dynamic aspect that is inherent in the labor movement very well.\* But it used to be generally taken for granted that labor would remain docile, or in the language of the philistines, "realistic," and suffer constant losses of its youngest and most virile elements, because of the existence of a wide frontier of opportunity—the sure substance of the American Dream that the lowliest and the poorest could with the outlay of energy and the exercise of intelligence move up on the ladder of social position and economic enrichment. This optimistic faith is no longer there. It is of interest to note that Daniel Bell, like so many other current ideologists, no longer relies on this relatively solid material foundation for the maintenance of conservatism, but rests his case on installment-buying sorcery and hoopla. The spokesmen of the New Right are cynical about the American Dream. And they know the

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\* Current industrial disputes, the editors of *Business Week* have said, are not "a series of isolated battles for isolated gains. Rather, they are part of a long-term, irrepressible struggle for power." (March 29, 1941.)

wage earners don't believe in it any longer.\*

But they have found an easy way out of the dilemma by extrapolating the fifties into an endless future: wage and salary earners will continue purchasing TV sets, automobiles, and little homes on credit. The shiny new toys will continue to keep them bemused and preoccupied. They will occasionally blow off steam, but this will not come to much since the worker accepts the same premises as the corporation president; namely, individualism and private property. The New Economists have freed themselves from the millstone of a balanced budget and have declared that it makes no difference how high a state pyramids its national debt; and the new breed of sociologists have freed themselves from the American Dream as the source of mass attachment to capitalism, and think that the trick can be

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\* See Ely Chinoy, *Automobile Workers and the American Dream*, Garden City, N. Y., 1955. In this remarkable study, Chinoy concludes, after an exhaustive investigation, that the automobile worker gives up taking the dream seriously at a very early point in his life. The author shows that the dream has little validity, and believes that it probably never had much validity even in the past.

He says: "There has also been increasing evidence that Americans have tended to interpret the past more in terms of folklore than of facts, that opportunities for vertical mobility were never as great as generally assumed and therefore could not have declined very much. William Miller has shown, for example, that the Horatio Alger sagas had little relationship to the careers of those who were the American business elite in 1900, that is, those who began their careers about 1870. The 'safety valve theory' which saw the frontier as an outlet for ambitious and dissatisfied urban workers has been shown to have little historical validity. The steadily increasing dominance of big business has tended to obscure the fact that the proportion of independent businessmen has remained relatively constant for the past sixty years and that the rate of failure among entrepreneurs has probably always been very high. What has appeared to some as a decline in opportunity may be merely a progressive awakening from an illusion created by the nation's extraordinary economic growth."

Chinoy and other scholars are performing a great service in debunking the Horatio Alger myths that have become imbedded in our history. Some of them may be going to the other extreme when they cast doubt on any progressive hardening of social lines. It would seem that the growing monopolization of the economy further constricts the lower layers. Even the professionals of the new middle classes, whose living standards may be formally superior to those of their counterparts of sixty years ago, have lost the independence of movement and social weight of their forebears.

turned just as satisfactorily with credit buying and gadgets. In the ideological as well as in the economic market place, the true conservative, who had faith in the stability and progress of the system, has been displaced by the nimble-fingered gambler who is sure that he can somehow keep on juggling things successfully.

The argument is sometimes given plain, and the argument is sometimes given fancy with statistics or learned quotations. Either way it represents the abdication of reason in favor of the boomer's logic that we have done fine up to now and hence we will continue to do all right. It has been said that faith moves mountains. It has also been said that in the face of sublime faith, reason must take a back seat. But what if Ecclesiastes was wrong when he thought there was nothing new under the sun? What if the social animal proceeds, in the manner of biological species, along an evolutionary line of progress?

## 9. An Epoch of Crises

Writing the fourth volume of the Commons labor history at the time of the Great Depression, Selig Perlman and Philip Taft tossed in at the end a fugitive paragraph which, unbeknownst to the authors, placed a question mark over a great area of their apologia for business unionism and the *status quo*. They said:

In the future . . . should the present depression turn into a chronic one, a development far from unthinkable, the very job consciousness of American unionism is likely to lead it to the espousal of government management of some industries, in order to take up the slack in unemployment. But this would happen not because unionism had gone over to the belief in a pre-determined social evolution towards socialism, nor because it had come to condemn the profit system as immoral in itself, but on the pragmatic ground that the unemployed must be re-employed—by the government if private industry fails to do it. (Commons, *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, p. 625.)

If we ignore the polemic against our familiar friend, the straw man (as if any one believed that a people turn against an entrenched and time-hallowed social system except through their own life ex-

periences and conclusions!) we are at the nub of the matter. If man's social consciousness is in the long run conditioned by his economic and political environment, if the actions he pursues and the institutions he devises represent attempts to master the blind social forces that govern his life and being, then the drift of the labor movement ought to be ascertainable from an analysis of the evolution of our society in this second half of the twentieth century. This is all the truer since labor unionism is a child of social stress and strain and reacts like the most sensitive of barometers to the public climate.

If we can construe the trends of present-day American capitalism as consistent with an image of relative social stability and economic well-being, or even with a continuation for the next two or three decades of an internal equilibrium balanced on a knife's edge—the story of the fifties—then we can envisage a labor movement in the continuing grip of conformity; then even flareups or strike waves can represent but momentary tests of strength to ascertain the precise ground for readjustment within an enfolding harmony. What if we get a virtually opposite reading from the chart? Some of its components include: 1) An annual  $3\frac{1}{2}$  to 4 percent rise in productivity in the last decade, with far more substantial increases in manufacturing, as against a possible  $2\frac{1}{2}$  percent rise in hourly wages; 2) an economy that is again showing a strong tendency to stagnation although resting on a war budget in the neighborhood of 15 percent of the national income; 3) the competition of a rival social system which is admittedly growing far more rapidly than capitalism; 4) the strategy of the United States to maintain the imperial system in the face of a burgeoning nationalism in Asia and Africa; 5) the implacable cold war between United States-led Western capitalism and the Soviet bloc.

Of course, it is not given to man to pierce the veil of the future, even the immediate future, in its empirical unfoldment. But some broad tendencies can be foreseen. It is a truism that we are living in an age of change although it is less clear what is on the other side of the divide. For the immediate purposes of this discussion, the prediction can be ventured that the precarious equilibrium of the fifties will be broken within another decade or less through the accumulation of internal and external tensions. We can anticipate disillusionment and exasperation because of recurring economic stagna-

tion and slumps.\* We can envisage waves of restlessness sweeping over the nation as a result of the dislocations brought on by "small wars" that are apparently due to remain a feature of our epoch. The repeated disruption of settled modes of existence will rend the fabric of social stability and produce a new political convulsion. Whatever refinements or amendments may be in order in this projection, it is social crisis, not Victorian serenity, that is in store for our nation in the days ahead.

When this labor army of 17½ million finds itself inside a flaming arena of political upheaval, it will lead to a shakeup of its present leadership, and provoke a more ambitious lunge to make government serve the common man's needs. May not the movement again settle down after a brief spurt of accomplishment, to yet another modified version of a business unionism? Possibly. Even probably. But we must recognize that the past cycles of explosion have not merely repeated themselves unchangingly like Pareto's circulation of elites. There has been an evolutionary line of progress. The line is not one of smooth ascent. The curve moves down as well as up. There are long stretches of years when it scarcely moves at all. Sometimes gains in organization or material benefits lead to losses in intellectual audacity. But overall there is an upward sweep. From 1886 to 1936 the transformation is enormous in labor's self-confidence, sustained solidarity, and organizational prowess.

The aims of every period of insurgency are set by the whole pre-

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\* Emil Mazey, Auto Union Secretary-Treasurer, was reported in *Ford Facts* (March 29, 1958) to have made these remarks to a meeting of the Detroit Ford local membership: "He stated that it must be recognized that unemployment was a built-in feature in our present economic system. Quoting Elliott Bell, editor and publisher of *Business Week* . . . he said that in the past 25 years there had been a business slump every four years, each slump averaging two years. He felt there was something basically wrong with an economic system that breaks down as frequently as ours does, with these recurring periods of unemployment that breed frustration, fear, poverty and broken homes, and it was time that something was done to correct the things that were wrong."

A recent volume by a Yale professor that has gained attention (William Fellner, *Trends and Cycles in Economic Activity*, New York, 1956) contains this declaration, given as a truism of our times: "Probably the most uncontroversial statement that can be made . . . is that extended periods of substantial unemployment have become intolerable. If periods of this sort should recur, the private enterprise system would be very unlikely to survive."

ceding development of mass consciousness, and each movement pursues those goals which recommend themselves to its participants as both necessary and realizable. If we are mindful that the tempo of change is slow in a rich and comparatively stable society, we would not go far wrong in charting our estimate that the next eruption, arising out of the popular need to gain control over the levers of government to ensure economic growth and to reorient our foreign relationships if we are to mitigate the risks of annihilating war, will most likely move close to what can be called in general terms a mildly socialistic or British Labor Party type of program. Whether this ought to be interpreted as a stage toward a cooperative commonwealth, or represents still another pragmatic adaptation within a liberal context to the mass society of our time, will depend on one's transcendental view of the drift of our civilization.

There are some aware of the dynamism of the social process and convinced of the superficiality of the current stability, who nevertheless fear that there is more likelihood of a victory for the extreme Right issuing out of any coming upheavals than a labor-liberal advance.\* They speak of the victories of fascist and military dictators over labor movements in Europe, and they call attention to the obvious unpreparedness and absence of leadership in the American union movement for a contest of that caliber. It would take us too far afield to pursue the matter here at any length. A few more or less didactic propositions will have to suffice.

Capitalism operates most cheaply and efficaciously under a parliamentary or semi-parliamentary system. Capitalists never prefer military adventurers or fascist freebooters except when social conflicts endanger their regime. Dictatorial movements of the Right never seize governmental power except with the connivance of at least important segments of the moneyed oligarchy. Periods of acute social crises are invariably accompanied by the flowering or at least existence of threatening anti-capitalist labor movements. For a variety of reasons,

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\* See Adolph Sturmthal, *The Tragedy of European Labor*, New York, 1943. While the solution that the author presents differs little from the policy he excoriates, he describes with impressive detail how time and again strong European labor movements, in the grip of "pressure group" outlooks, lacked the program to unite the nation for progressive ends in periods of storm and stress and consequently succumbed to reaction.

it appears that the social conflict is developing in this country at a slow enough pace so that the next movement of insurgency will be confined to the arena of quasi-parliamentary politics and trade union struggles. Naturally, the question is not disposed of by black-and-white demarcations. Our age has shown that the dividing line between democracy and dictatorship is shifting and variable; and it is incontestable that in a conflict, labor can lose as well as win. All the more reason why the re-equipping of the labor movement with the program, outlook, strategy, and alliances that are required to cope with the dangers, as well as to make use of the opportunities of our epoch, stands as a top priority for the realization of beneficial social advances.



## 10. The Politics of Drift

Labor's going policies originated during the New Deal and are an adaptation to the relationships of that period. But they lack viability for the solution of any one of the immediate major challenges now confronting labor, whether it is the need to halt the anti-labor offensive, or an organization drive to enroll some of the key divisions of the still unorganized majority of the working class, or to break into the South.

Labor's mammoth structure buttresses all the tendencies to conservatism and discourages all innovations which appear increasingly as unwarranted risk-taking. On the other hand, as the labor movement grows bigger and its social weight increases, it becomes proportionately more, not less, dependent on large social forces and cannot successfully confine itself to "pressure group" techniques. Endless palavers about labor-management harmony of interests do not gainsay the



fact that the labor movement is a disturbing element within capitalist society, and the larger and stronger it becomes the more it tends to upset the equilibrium. Unions can be as reasonable as sweet charity and headed by the most impeccable of free enterprisers. They are always a source of irritation. They are sometimes a source of danger. No matter how dictatorial the labor leader gets, or how much distance he tries to put between himself and his ranks, he cannot free himself too much too long from the wishes of his constituents. If he does, there is always the possibility that he may be displaced by another leadership with a more radical turn of mind; or that his members will lose their minimal loyalties and the organization will disintegrate. That is one reason why employers do not make peace with the unions. They simply grant truces subject to periodic renewal.

The "pressure group" psychology did not work effectively even in Gompers' day. When the AFL was peppered with court injunctions and damage suits after the 1904 employers' offensive, or when the trade union bureaucracy was swallowed up in Wilson's war machine in 1917, Gompers' much-touted "voluntarism" became more of a catchword to beat down radical opponents at AFL conventions than a legitimate description of the AFL program. But whatever its uses and values in the hazy, far-away, almost semi-mythical world that existed prior to World War I—and it had some—it is an anachronism at present when labor unions are up to their necks, or as one writer put it, "down to their knees," in politics.

It served limited purposes in the thirties when the climate was progressive. But in this decade of gathering reaction, the policy of drift has led to adaptation to reaction in national affairs, and retreat before reaction in trade union affairs. What happens in practice is that the labor leaders seek sustenance by clutching at the coattails of the liberals. But the liberals are engulfed by the reactionary tide and are making peace with the moderate conservatives. These, in turn, are in retreat before the extreme Right. The unions consequently find themselves buffeted this way and that by forces which are not of their making and which are beyond their reach. They are condemned to be a plaything of forces which others initiate and control. At best, the policy serves to blunt the edge of the attack and slow down the retreat. But it cannot reverse the tide.

Labor's current coalition does not challenge the essential distribution of political power. In effect, it accepts it, but by means of its political alliances it succeeds at times in altering subsidiary decisions, in wangling second-rate concessions, in participating on the lower levels of patronage handouts, and in deflecting the more extreme anti-labor excursions of political carpetbaggers. The policy can be described as a holding operation, and not an exceptionally successful one at that. Labor indeed needs alliances with other sectors of the population. This aspect of the break with Gompersism is thoroughly sound. But it would seem that in any meaningful alliances, labor should wield its proper proportionate influence, and the alliance should be the instrumentality to battle for necessary improvements and changes rather than immobilizing its main participant.

The union administrators recognize no alternative to the present course as they have gotten lost in technical difficulties. They argue that before a new party can even be contemplated, the labor people have to be enrolled in the union political action setups, they have to be trained to register faithfully, this and that bloc that is presently quiescent will have to be activized, etc., etc. "You have to learn to crawl before you can walk." They believe, as a matter of fact, that as labor perfects its political action techniques "at the grass roots levels," it will be in a position to realize many of its present goals.

Clearly, the argument has some validity. A certain amount of progress can be made under the present ground rules by doorbell ringing, organizational push, and administrative coordination. But after limited advances, the whole process necessarily and repeatedly grinds to a halt. And for obvious reasons. The politics of the electoral campaigns are determined by the Democratic machines. They set the tone, fix the scope, provide the content, if any. As the politics of 99 percent of the Democratic candidates is water-logged at best, and indistinguishable from the Republicans at worst, the amount of excitement that unions can generate among their members is strictly rationed. The policy works most successfully in localized instances when unionists can be aroused to defeat a particularly obnoxious candidate or unusually wretched bill. But fifteen years of pressure politics have failed to alter the contour of American politics. What is even worse, they have been insufficient for labor to hold its own.

The unprecedented boom going back to 1941 has lent plausibility to an otherwise bankrupt game. The temper of the leadership being what it is, it can be surmised that it will take an unusual jolt before there is any change of course. The most progressive of the officials, like Emil Mazey of the Auto Union, say they still think a labor party is the right thing, but "now is not the time." Walter Reuther, who as late as 1943 was giving behind-the-scenes encouragement to the Michigan Commonwealth Federation, has since become converted to the "realism" that a labor party has no place in the American scene. Other more conservative leaders consider the very question to be a form of screwballism. The chorus of the leaders is all but unanimous, and the ranks either agree or are too bewildered to have any specific opinions. A policy of retreat sets up moods of apathy in the ranks which in turn reinforce and are used to justify the policy. We are in a vicious circle. It appears that the politics of drift are destined to continue until they hit the shoals of crisis; and that means that the retreat will not be reversed for the spell ahead.

But it is almost inconceivable that this tired worldly wisdom can survive a crisis. While times are good, conflicts can continue to be sidetracked and contradictory claims can be papered over with flimsy solutions, with the unions veering and tacking and warding off the worst of the blows leveled at them. But in times of social stress, this labor leviathan will be thrust willy-nilly into the center of the social arena, and the ground will quake under "muddling through" strategies. The alliance within the Democratic Party is of the kind which will crack the moment the labor leaders are under pressures to make significant social demands. Whether a new party will be formed in roughly the way the British party got started, or whether a large part of the Democratic Party (which the old Populists used to call the whore of American politics) will get overhauled to form a bastardized sort of labor-liberal party is of course impossible to foresee. Because of this country's past mobility, and the cynicism of its folkways, its politics have always been extraordinarily opportunistic, even by European standards. (The story is told that the Tammany Hall boss, Charles F. Murphy, when informed in the twenties of the large vote that the Socialist Party had received in one of the working-class districts, said: "We don't need a Socialist Party. If the people of New York want socialism, then Tammany Hall will give it to

them.") But through one means or another (although we are inclined to exclude Tammany Hall as a possibility) the contours of American politics are due for modification. Until that time, labor's political position will remain precarious.

## 11. The Challenge of the South

The most important slogan of the trade union Left in the twenties was the call for the organization of the unorganized. With the unionization of the main mass production industries, the demand has lost some of its edge, but union growth remains a most sensitive gauge of the morale of the labor movement. Its phenomenal progress since 1934 notwithstanding, the American union movement remains behind most of the European countries in the extent of its organization. The fact that a theoretical two thirds of wage and salary earners are outside the fold testifies to its still limited dynamism. The penetration ratios, as estimated by Leo Wolman for 1947, showed 52 percent in all manufacturing, 62 percent in transportation, communication, and public utilities, 75 percent in building construction, 84 percent in mining, quarrying, and oil—but only 9 percent in services and 12 percent in public employment. A more recent estimate calculated about 10 percent of department store employees as organized, and only 7 percent of all retail. Moreover, certain industries, like textiles and chemical, are still largely untouched, while the South remains a haven of the runaway plant, the open shop, and the lower wage differential.

The constant changes in the economy necessitate constant new organization if the labor movement is to maintain its grip. In recent years, for instance, there has taken place the multiplication of white collar workers, the steady movement of plants in certain industries into the South, the decentralization of operations, and the building of new rationalized plants in new communities. The unions can soon find their strength ebbing away unless they keep step with economic transformations. They are presently not making any significant inroads into the main unorganized fields: white collar, trade and service, small communities, and the South.

The theory is popular in some quarters that labor's growth is a thing of the past. A recent college text states, "In the United States, the 'heroic period' of union founding is over." (Melvin W. Reder, *Labor in a Growing Economy*, New York, 1957, p. 518.) Daniel Bell has argued that the easy stuff is all organized and that "organized labor has probably passed its peak strength." (*Fortune*, April 1953, p. 204.) One might counter by pointing out that what is easy stuff is not a constant. Automobile workers were untouchable in 1927 and unstoppable in 1937. National Guardsmen shot at pickets at the Auto-Lite strike in Toledo in 1934, and a year and a half later some of them were marching the picket line back in their home town in Defiance, Ohio. The office secretary who has a nameplate on her desk and dreams of marrying the junior executive across the hall might be fairly immune to the lures of unionism this year, and feel very differently about it next year after she has been worked over by automation.

There is this much validity, however, to Bell's thesis: if we take the present social climate as unchangeable, unions are not going to make any noteworthy advances. Good planning and aggressive staff work can of course enroll many thousands even today. The Teamsters have shown resourcefulness and militancy of a *condottiere* variety in organizing. The Packinghouse Union has been successful in a number of hard-fought strikes. Even the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, according to its reports, signed up 69,000 new members in 1957. But for a basic breakthrough into new fields, aggressive staff work is not enough. A political and social shift has to pave the way for organization. The major groups that now stand outside the unions, like white collar and professional workers, or workers in the South, are inhibited from joining unions by age-long stubborn prejudices—in the case of the first, middle-class snobbery, in the case of the second, Jim Crow and Scissorbill attitudes. To make massive inroads into these redoubts of resistance, it will take nothing less than a social crusade in the course of which the fierce prejudices can be melted down, or at least allayed. The challenge of the South points up the problem.

The South is the Sicily of the United States. The territory reeks with race prejudice and is sick with the diseases of social decay. It is in the grip of a Bourbon cabal which has fashioned white supremacy

into a flaming issue to perpetuate its own regional rule and its disproportionate power on the national scene. While this oligarchy remains in the saddle, it will make a mockery of labor's political aspirations, and in many instances threaten the union's wage scales. Until the South is overhauled socially to conform to at least the Northern pattern, it will drag down any attempts at a liberal reorganization of government. High on the agenda—if not at the very top—to reverse the present tide of reaction stands the unfinished work of cleansing these Augean stables of particularism and backwardness.

Were unionism to become as effective in the South as it is in the Midwest, the precondition would exist for the replacement of its present anachronistic social arrangements. But all attempts to organize the South by means of routine trade union methods have either broken on the rock of entrenched reaction or disintegrated under the debilitating social climate. Even when the CIO was marching through the country with seven league boots, its textile organization campaign was one of its least successful ventures, with very little showing made in the South. Overall union membership in 1938 in eleven Southern states (excluding Texas, Oklahoma, and West Virginia) probably numbered no more than 450,000. After the war, the CIO made a major effort to open up the South, and the AFL followed suit as well. Philip Murray announced with great fanfare to the Auto Union convention in March 1946 that a million dollars was going to be collected for a Southern drive and that 200 skilled organizers were going into the field. "There is no other instrumentality that I know of anywhere in America," he proclaimed, "that seems quite so capable of performing that task as the Congress of Industrial Organizations. . . . You remember we started this crusade in the North just ten years ago, and now we are going into the South. . . . Thank God we have an institution that can go into the South—the CIO." (*Proceedings of the Tenth UAW Convention*, Atlantic City, 1946, pp. 100-101.)

The publicity handouts read impressively, and the *CIO News* boasted on November 15, 1948, that the "organizing committee had added 900 new locals and 450,000 new members to the CIO rolls since Operation Dixie began." The AFL reported that it had signed up a quarter of a million new members. But *Fortune* magazine was unfortunately closer to the truth when it stated in its October 1948

number: "The CIO Southern drive, now grinding to a halt, may be taken over by the Textile Workers Union, which has been supplying most of the funds and organizers. Gains apart from textiles have brought in only dribs and drabs of woodworkers and furniture workers, and other odd lots." (p. 150.) As for the Textile Union, its achievements were likewise less than satisfactory. Its 1946 convention records revealed that it then had only 125 contracts covering 67,000 workers in the South. The union's research director, Solomon Barkin, made this flat summary of the results of CIO's Operation Dixie: "The drive made no real headway in the textile industry." (*International Labor Review*, May 1957, p. 401.)

Another expert on Southern labor, Frank T. De Vyver, came to the conclusion that "rosy predictions made at the start of the campaign have not been attained. The great Cannon Mill and Avondale chains, two prime objectives, still are unorganized. The furniture and lumber industries have barely been touched, and there are other announced objectives which have not been attained." (*Southern Economic Journal*, July 1949, p. 3.) Not to put too fine an embroidery on it, the campaign was an abysmal failure. A report on the Southern textile industries issued by the Senate read: "Millions of dollars have been spent for organizing by the unions since the end of World War II, and yet Mr. Emil Rieve, President of the TWU-CIO, testified before the subcommittee that membership in his union in the South had declined from 20 percent of the textile employees to 15 percent in the last few years." (Senate Subcommittee on Labor and Labor-Management Relations of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Hearings*, 82nd Congress, 2nd Session, 1951, p. 362.)

The CIO campaign in the thirties erupted as a more or less spontaneous affair in which serried ranks were not afraid to convert a trade union organization campaign into a social uprising. The Southern drive of the CIO by contrast was a tight-fisted bureaucratic show where middle-aged business agents, taking a leaf out of William Green's Southern drive of 1929, thought to slip into the South unobtrusively by double-talking around the race question and reassuring all and sundry of the unassailable respectability of the organized labor movement. It didn't work. Ordinary trade union techniques could not break through the tangled skein of race hatreds, small

town provincialism, backwoods prejudices, and the militant opposition of the government-employer alliance.

The Senate subcommittee report described in lurid detail what unionism is up against in the South. Here are a few excerpts from the findings:

Self-organization and collective bargaining (in the Southern textile industry) are steadily losing ground. The retreat of union organization is being compelled by employer campaigns on an area-wide front. Much of this campaign is being conducted in shocking violation of the Labor-Management Relations Act, and the National Labor Relations Board appears to be powerless to cope with the situation. . . . Employers will use some or all of the following methods: surveillance of organizers and union adherents; propaganda through rumours, letters, news stories, advertisements; organization of the whole community for anti-union activity; labor espionage; discharge of union sympathizers; violence and gun play; injunctions; the closing or moving of the mill; endless litigation before the NLRB and the courts, etc. If all this fails, the employers will try to stall, in slow succession, first the election, then the certification of the union, and finally, the negotiation of a contract. Few organizing campaigns survive this type of onslaught. . . .

Where unions have managed to get formed, the employers then go to work to bust the union: the grievance procedure is broken down; the disgruntled workers are urged by management to revoke the check-off of dues; union representatives are denied access to the plant; union leaders are fired. This may be called the softening-up process. When the contract comes up for renegotiation, impossible demands are made; negotiations drag on interminably; employees are propagandized on the unreasonable attitude of union negotiators; expiration of the contract forces a strike; injunction is secured; strikers are hailed for contempt; a back-to-work movement is started; fights are precipitated; workers are evicted from homes in the mill village; peace officers harass the strikers; the National Guard is called out; loans to union members are called in; credit is stopped; ministers urge return to work; the strike collapses under this conjunction of economic, physical, moral and religious pressure; returning employees are refused employment; blacklists block employment in other mills. If the strike cannot be broken, the plant can be closed and machinery transferred to another mill or sold. (*Ibid*, pp. 55, 60, 64.)



This is an updating of well-known union-busting techniques exposed by the La Follette Committee in 1937. But for all their revelation of ruthlessness and brutality, they leave out two elements that make the South a unique problem: racism and the one-party state. It is these two which lend to traditional employer anti-unionism its special invincibility and keep those unions that have gained a foothold on the thin edge of legality. Southern local governments often resemble those of company towns in pre-New Deal days. And race hatred, which at one and the same time is the necessity and justification for the dictatorial system, has infected, with scattered honorable exceptions, the whole of the white community, and remains a deadly agent in blocking and disrupting union organization.\* Here is a deeply imbedded abscess which will respond only to thoroughgoing social therapy. Yet the prerequisites exist for a successful labor offensive and even in terms of the South's own experience, the specific manifestations of the disease have been shown to be manageable.

Despite the official outcry against unionism as a foreign and subversive importation, Southern unions made progress during the war years when the Northern unions were growing apace. Southern membership, which was less than half a million in 1938, was estimated around the million mark ten years later. Texas, which has been industrializing very rapidly for the past two decades and which has had an influx of many good-sized plants belonging to national concerns that are unionized, has experienced union growth in manufacturing, railroading, telephone and telegraph, transit, and interstate trucking. In 1953, it was estimated that its total union membership was just under a fifth of all nonagricultural workers. Bureau of Labor Statistics community wage surveys for 1953-1954 showed the following percentage of manufacturing plant workers covered by union

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\* "Today, throughout the South, thousands of men and women who work in textile mills at below-standard wages, in below-standard conditions, vote against unions because they are showered with racist propaganda of the lowest kind." (Harvey Swados, *Nation*, July 5, 1958.)

Only recently, the CIO Electrical Union was defeated at the Neco Company in Bay Springs, Mississippi, when the company circulated a photograph of the union president, James B. Carey, shown dancing with a colored woman (who happened to be an African delegate to a meeting of the International Labor Organization).

contracts in leading Southern cities: Dallas, 61; New Orleans, 63; Memphis, 78; Atlanta, 57. Other surveys showed sizeable organization in Birmingham, Richmond, and Norfolk.

What we are witnessing is a complex crisscrossing of a number of contradictory tendencies which is uprooting the traditional South of the plantations and magnolia trees: growing industrialization and urbanization with attendant attempts among workers to fashion instruments of self-protection; the institutional strength of national unions trying to penetrate competitive areas, especially moving in the wake of national concerns under union contract. At the same time, the backwardness of the South acts as a magnet to attract new industries because of its large reservoir of farm labor—presumably docile and cheap—to draw upon, and its feudalistic governments which welcome the newcomer with low taxes and accommodating law-enforcement agencies. With the growth of urban society and a modern working class, the political superstructure is out of harmony with the social base. That very much overworked expression, “a society in transition,” is truly applicable in the case of the South—a region rotten ripe for big social and political changes. At any rate, there is manifestly nothing in the character of the Southern working class which is inimical to unionization. Indeed, one can sweep aside all the statistics of Southern union membership and demonstrate the proposition by the CIO experience: the Southern hillbillies and crackers, when thrust into the environment of modern industry in the North, became, despite all their prejudices and ignorance, one of the mainstays of the CIO uprising in Detroit, Flint, Akron.

Race division may appear to be a more insuperable obstacle to unionization than regulation union-busting and one which can long and successfully defy the usual arguments of material self-interest. Yet there have been many union experiences right in the South which have demonstrated that when the unions courageously adhered to a clear-cut principle, the whites were led to accept, as a fact of life, Negroes working beside them with comparable union rights. The United Mine Workers has a large organization in the South and runs it successfully on non-discriminatory lines. It is true that miners are a specialized breed and that the no-Jim Crow tradition is strong in the industry. But packinghouse, rubber, auto, smelter, and tobacco locals have built up an impressive case that a non-discriminatory

policy can be practiced and that at least a reasonable degree of solidarity can be secured in union affairs.

## 12. Negro Unionism Since the CIO

There has been an extensive national experience built up in the past years upon which to rest judgments and conclusions. Until the New Deal, unionism was pretty much a white man's proposition. Most of the important AFL unions and Railroad Brotherhoods either barred Negroes entirely, or where they grudgingly permitted them in, segregated them into special lodges. During World War I, probably a quarter of a million Negroes went North to man the war industries, but by the Great Depression they had been forced out of their positions and relegated to either the very hot, dirty, and heavy jobs, or to certain menial jobs traditionally reserved to them. Since the American Negro often broke into Northern industry as a strike-breaker, the bitterness between the white and black worker was further aggravated, and the attainment of labor solidarity loomed as a well-nigh hopeless goal. In the South, where Negro artisans had been firmly established through a lower wage structure, Negroes were being pushed out of the building and hand trades under the fierce competition for jobs, and unions were sometimes the vehicle to do the pushing. Inevitably, the Negro community was almost universally hostile to labor unions and understandably considered them a roadblock to Negro employment in trades and industry.

The CIO changed all that, at least in the North. Black and white solidarity—which had appeared to be another of the many quixotic utopias of radicals—came to America not imperceptibly, but with a rush. From the moment of its formation, the CIO opened its doors to all Negro workers on an equal basis. There were no constitutional bars, no segregation of the colored into separate locals, no secret Jim Crow rituals. Mindful of their sad experiences of the past, Negroes were hesitant about joining at first, but their doubts, fears, and antagonisms were overcome in the heat of the labor struggles and the CIO's demonstrations of good faith. They got drawn into the unions, and the employers' efforts to pit them against the whites

were frustrated. The pendulum began to swing in the labor direction throughout the Negro communities; and in time the Negro preachers, lawyers, doctors, and funeral parlor entrepreneurs had to swallow their prejudices and accept unionism as part of the Negro's way of life.

Like all important prizes in life, this was not won without a considerable battle. It must be appreciated that the middle-class professionals and business folk who dominate the Negro communities had been traditionally no less hostile to labor organizations than the white middle classes. Some of them thought, Uncle Tom-like, that it would do the Negro no good to fool around with organizations of dubious respectability; some distrusted all the white man's organizations and adopted an exclusive nationalist view; and some, as E. Franklin Frazier has shown, had built up a vested interest in the segregated Negro ghetto. George S. Schuyler has given a devastating account of their role throughout this heroic period in labor's history. He wrote:

Recently I visited 35 industrial centers investigating the response of the Negro workers to the new labor unionization drive. Almost everywhere Negro workers were found to be flocking to both AFL and CIO unions in unprecedented numbers. They were functioning as officers in literally scores of unions. . . . Here at long last were color prejudices and discrimination being effectively attacked through labor association, organization and education. . . . Not in fifty years has America witnessed such interracial solidarity.

But the most disheartening observation in connection with this labor revolution was the indifference, hostility and open opposition of so many "educated" Negroes holding positions of trust and leadership in their respective communities. . . . Their desertion of the struggling Negro workers in this crisis constitutes one of the most shameful chapters in our recent history. The new position Negro labor has won in the past year has been gained in spite of the old leadership. It has been won with new leadership; militant young men and women from the ranks of labor and grizzled veterans of the pick and shovel and the blast furnace. . . . Nowhere was the bulk of Negro leaders actively aiding the Negro workers upon whom they depended for a livelihood. Nowhere were the "educated classes" cooperating with the unions to aid the work of organization, save in a few notable instances, and there by only one or two individuals. Nowhere were Negro preachers opening their churches for labor meetings

although they were glad to give any itinerant bush priest a "break." Here and there a preacher, lawyer, a politician or social worker was found whose aid to the workers cannot be too highly commended. But a great many more denounced the new unions as "radical," were belligerent in siding with the employers and in some instances openly recruited strikebreakers to take the jobs of the black unionists. The sentiments they expressed were invariably a rehash of the editorials in the local kept press. (*Crisis*, November 1937, p. 328.)

The struggle to accept unions can be said to have been won when the CIO finally triumphed over the Ford Motor Company, and the approximately 8,000 Negroes working at the River Rouge plant signed up with the UAW. This was a symbolic case, as Henry Ford dominated the Detroit Negro community politically, taking advantage of the fact that he was the largest single employer of Negro labor and had broken the traditional bars of the industry in his hiring policies. This epic battle to establish the union at Ford split the Negro community right down the middle, with many preachers actively engaged in recruiting strikebreakers. At the flash point, a few of the national NAACP figures and the more far-sighted local leaders stepped to the fore, broke the "back-to-work" movement then being organized, and the Negro ghetto elements were put to rout. From that time on, it was no longer popular in Negro circles to scoff at unions or ridicule union men.

The 1937 campaign was a historic climacteric in breaking down the wall between black and white labor. But despite its transcendent substance, the immediate effects were necessarily limited. The early CIO drives and strikes were waged to secure bargaining relations and improved conditions for the workers on the job. The CIO was too busy in this period fighting for its right to live to be concerned with the hiring practices of the companies. It had its hands full trying to organize the people employed by the corporations. Hence, the early CIO victories were of immediate benefit only to the Negroes already working in the mass production industries. Those discriminated against at the hiring gate, and without a job, derived no immediate advantage. As throughout the thirties unemployment was hitting the black worker far more drastically than the white, the new unionism, with all its virtues, was helpless to solve one of his most pressing needs.

Inside the CIO unions, the non-discrimination policy often looked better on paper than it actually was. Not because of any hypocrisy or double-dealing on the part of most top CIO officials, to be sure. It was simply too much to expect that ingrained prejudices of white workers could be wiped out overnight. The constitutional provisions were often circumvented or ignored, and in the South, openly flouted. The advanced CIO policy derived, after all, not from the superiority of the human material in the CIO unions as against AFL unions, but because of economic circumstances. The traditional craft union was built on the idea of creating a monopoly in a given trade, and that idea led to exclusion of Negroes, of other minority groups, of newcomers in general. The labor supply had to be kept limited. The industrial union on the contrary had to rest on solidarity, and hence was forced to battle from the first against all divisive prejudices based on craft, color, religion, or nationality. In the long run, the primacy of material interests in human affairs broke through to the point where even the most deeply-rooted of prejudices began slowly giving way under the impact of stern necessities.

Nevertheless, for an underprivileged group to raise itself to a position of equality is a long arduous business. Exploitation is never easily dislodged. Only a small start had been made. Discrimination remained the rule in employment, and Negroes continued working chiefly in the unskilled and most poorly paid divisions. The proportion of Negroes in manufacturing had grown from 6.2 percent in 1910 to 7.3 percent in 1930. By 1940, it was at the new low of 5.1 percent. The ground lost in the depression had not been regained. Robert C. Weaver wrote in his documented study: "When the defense program got under way, the Negro was only on the sidelines of American industrial life. . . . The forces of racial reaction felt that their position was secure. . . . The color caste system seemed to be firmly entrenched." (*Negro Labor*, New York, 1946, p. 15.)

The war boom which started in 1940 soon absorbed all of the available white male labor supply. By 1941, a universal cry went up for more workers to man the expanding industries and perform the thousand and one tasks necessary to keep the economy going. But in spite of the acute labor shortages, the color bars held fast, and Negroes were effectively excluded from most employment opportunities. In a number of cities, the thousands of new workers pouring in cre-

ated acute difficulties because of the lack of necessary housing and transportation, yet old-time colored residents of the city were refused jobs. For many of the new jobs Negroes lacked the required skills, but in the first two years they were kept out of the defense training program.

Naturally, the Negro community was in an uproar. Everyone realized that it was now or never so far as breaking into industry was concerned. If the Negro could not find employment while the country was clamoring for labor, it was obvious that he was forever doomed to a serf status. Negro leaders protested heatedly, conferred with government officials, sent innumerable appeals—and nothing happened. Walter White wrote to John Temple Graves, the Southern journalist, that he had pleaded repeatedly with Roosevelt to do something but that the President refused, giving as his reason that “the South would rise up in protest.” After considerable pressure, several government departments sent out vaguely worded letters, but the situation remained basically unchanged. Gunnar Myrdal reported in *An American Dilemma*, that (in mid-1942) Negroes made less headway in the war boom than during World War I. “In September 1941, it was ascertained that the great bulk of the war plants did not have any Negroes at all among their workers.” (p. 412.)

It was painfully plain that the old methods of the middle-class leaders were getting the black workers nowhere, and that the labor movement would not take the initiative on the issue. In that hour of frustration, A. Philip Randolph, President of the AFL Pullman Porters Union, stepped forward with the proposal that 50,000 Negro workers march on Washington “to exact their rights in National Defense employment and the armed forces of the country.” The idea took on like wildfire. A March-On-Washington Committee, headed by Randolph and other prominent Negro leaders, was formed and the march was officially announced for July 1, 1941. By spring, Negro communities all over the North were seething, and instead of the 50,000 called for, a minimum of 100,000 black workers were preparing to march. This militant challenge woke up the powers-that-be who felt that such a demonstration in time of war would constitute a damaging blow to national unity and the country’s democratic pretensions. Finally, after much scurrying to and fro, the White House capitulated, and on June 25 Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802

prohibiting discrimination in government and defense industry. A dose of mass action, or, as in this case, the threat of it, strategically timed, accomplished what all the appeals, exhortations, begging, and fancy negotiations had failed to achieve.

After that a number of CIO unions went to bat in support of the wartime FEPC and acted with courage in stamping out the "hate strikes" that erupted. As a consequence Negroes were admitted into new departments and some of the old patterns of discrimination were breached. The CIO experience in these crucial years demonstrated that given enough push the membership can be educated to rid itself of ancient prejudices, and that up to a point at any rate the race barriers can be broken down. Gunnar Myrdal had written in 1942, "It is not even certain that the leaders of the CIO unions who are friendly to the Negroes will be able to maintain discipline respecting non-discrimination among their rank and file membership . . . . It is quite possible that they may have to face the alternative of either following the rank-and-filers' anti-Negro attitude or being exchanged for new leaders." (*op. cit.*, p. 425.) There were some instances of this kind, but they were not the rule. Even in the South, union officers were able to adhere to non-discrimination and get re-elected.

Taking advantage of favorable social circumstances, Negro mass pressure when allied with progressive unionism was able to change the pattern of Negro employment in the North. The Negro now has positions of strength that he lacked twenty years ago. The CIO, in this field as in others, redeemed the good name of unionism and made possible the visualization of Negro-white solidarity as a practical strategy. Compared to the old AFL, with its unashamed discriminatory provisions, an immense distance has been traveled. This stands as an illustration of what can be done. Of course, the accomplishment should not be exaggerated. Although the color caste system has been dented, it has not been eliminated by half. Negro living standards rose in the decade after 1940, but as Walter Reuther reported, "By 1950, in the absence of federal FEPC and amidst increased practices of discrimination at the hiring gate, minority groups were slowly but surely being pushed back to their pre-war earnings and employment status." Once the wartime breakthrough was over, equality within unions had also fallen into a rigidly rationed schema.



### 13. A Stalled Engine

In the South, the racist front is totalitarian, and nothing less than a full-dress campaign will tumble the walls of Jericho. The examples previously offered of the coal miners and other unions were cited to illustrate the possibilities and potentialities. They convey a totally false impression, however, if they are intended to buttress a thesis that unionism is gradually and effectively solving the race question and moving toward an integrated labor movement in the South. This is the Pollyanna message of a recent study published by the National Labor Service in cooperation with eight AFL-CIO unions, financed by the Fund for the Republic (Harry Fleischman and James Rorty, *We Open The Gates*, New York, 1958)—an attempt to make a summer out of some swallows. Such growth of unionism as there has been in the main centers of the South, and the restricted amount of Negro advancement in employment,\* should give no false picture of the overall posture of Southern unionism. It is infected with the racist venom of Southern society. To the extent that it has made inroads, it has done so, by and large, by accepting, not by challenging, the mores of the Bourbons. That is not good enough. Unless and until labor squarely tackles the racial division and breaks down the barriers at least to the extent of the North, the South will continue to stand as the bastion of political reaction and the status of Southern unionism will remain shaky and equivocal. With its present attitudes, the labor movement may continue to make peripheral advances. It will not go beyond that.\*\*

Oh, the official posture of most of the national heads is all right. They make the proper noises and go through the right motions. Some of the more advanced ones even have an *entente cordiale* with

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\* A 1949 statistical study of the Southeast showed in that year all white families and individuals with an income 83 percent of the national average, but Negro families and individuals with only 36 percent. These figures are of especial significance since from 1940 to 1950 Negro workers in this area declined by a third in agriculture, and increased by 30 percent in manufacturing, 55 percent in retail and wholesale trade, 74 percent in construction.

\*\* A national CIO official who personally is strongly committed to combatting discrimination remarked on his role as an official: "Quite frankly, we aren't crusaders. We do our best to steer away from the race question whenever we can. We're in the business of organizing, not bettering race relations." (William Kornhauser, "Ideology and Interests—The Determinants of Union Actions," *Journal of Social Issues*, 1953, p. 57.)

the heads of the NAACP. In a number of unions, educational programs have been organized to try to bring the white members along on the question. What is the caviling about, then? It might appear as if criticism were purely captious. Well, the importance of all these gestures should not be overestimated. After all, a policy cannot forever justify itself on the grounds that it represents an advance over a policy of the past. It must justify itself, first of all, by how well it meets the requirements of the present. And the answer is: it doesn't meet them very satisfactorily. The cooperation between Negro and labor leaders is nominal and severely circumscribed by the conformist attitudes of both sets of bureaucracies. The union programs themselves are pedestrian propositions saturated with the liberalistic cant that is so characteristic of labor public relations.\* The reaction of the union heads to the crucial events like the Birmingham bus boycott, the Washington Prayer Pilgrimage, and the scandal at Little Rock, give the true lay of the land. The pious pronouncements have been placed on record, but the unions have kept clear of actual involvement. In his current battle to break the age-old shackles in the South, the Negro, for a variety of reasons, is getting powerful support from the federal judiciary, but he cannot count on support, beyond some verbal encouragement, from the labor movement.

This is a tragic turn of events, since it means that labor is again missing the Southern bus. The crisis that broke over the South with the Supreme Court's rulings on segregation set the stage for labor's dramatic re-entry on the scene. If a new Southern drive had been mounted at that psychological moment, the old alliance between the two races that had been disrupted with malice aforethought after the breakup of the Populist movement might very well have been re-established and the Bourbon oligarchy would have probably been toppled. But social events are the products of an endless chain of prior causes and effects. And unfortunately, the labor movement of the North is not advancing, but retreating. The Southern workers are not raptly watching Northern skies blazing with the magical message

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\* "While organizational interests usually override ideological beliefs, positive race relations creeds often do find direct expression in formal 'educational programs' on race relations. Such programs receive major attention in most studies of union race relations. *This study, on the other hand, shows that these programs, and the creeds underlying them, occupy a marginal position in the trade union's scheme of things.*" (*Ibid*, p. 57.)

of another CIO crusade, but are regaled by a reactionary press with tales of labor racketeering. The Negro's growing self-assertiveness in the South has consequently found no friendly echo in the unions. Instead, the white opposition has become more obstreperous, and the Southern unions are on the defensive because of attacks both from within and without. The result is that labor is on the sidelines in this historic crisis. What a missed opportunity!

Legal dispensations, valuable though they are, will never alter the physiognomy of the South until a social force arises down there to push through changes in its political dispositions. And until this rampart of reaction is cracked, labor will remain impeded in any national advance. There is no attempt here to play down the difficulties. Nor is the foregoing meant to suggest that a little more bustling on the part of the union policymakers will suffice to reorganize the South. The Little Rock affair and the landslide re-election of Governor Faubus on a blatantly racist platform should dispel any illusions that any may have been cherishing on that score. There is no quickfire solution that can be put into operation by this labor movement, headed by this labor leadership, holding the posture that it does, and functioning within the political relationships that presently prevail. It is impossible to seize one link out of a complex social reality and refashion it arbitrarily. The question has to be considered from the viewpoint of what it will take to resolve the historic impasse.

The problem will respond to solution only as the labor movement begins to face up to its responsibilities *as a labor movement*, not as an assortment of individual unions following the path of least resistance and looking after their separate parochial affairs. It is not a matter of devising special techniques for a new Southern campaign, while the Northern unions persevere in their present course. It is rather a question of the national labor movement becoming a battler again for the American underdog, one of the planks of which program will necessarily include militant opposition to the discriminatory disabilities of the Negro in the South, and the elimination of the one-party regime with its accompaniment of extra-legal violence.

We are all aware that Southern white workers are at present inhospitable to such a plea. But the Northern experience has demonstrated that people can shed their prejudices, or parts of them, under pressure of necessities, and that forceful leadership when helped by

impersonal social events can re-direct viewpoints. The plain fact of the matter is that the old South of the ignorant and terrorized Negro is crumbling and that the old white leadership is in a crisis. If a new social force appeared on the scene and offered a new alternative, it could win the backing of sizeable sections of white labor. Just as unorganized workers so often need the help of their better-situated brethren to confront the employers of their own domain, so this backward region that has been polluted with racism over so many years cries aloud to the national movement to help it sweep away the debris of a century of misrule. This is in no way negated because the people of the South, like people elsewhere who need outside help in the most desperate way, are provincial to a fault and bitterly resent the intrusion of outsiders into their affairs.

It is often said that only the Southerners themselves can put through the change. This is true in the sense that it was true for the workers of the mass production industries twenty years ago. Only when they were ready to move, only when they resolved to lift the heavy burden off their backs, could a change take place in those industries. But their decision did not spring into being fully armed like Minerva from the brow of Jupiter. It was conditioned and determined by many causes, not the least important of which was the call to action by the newly created CIO. In the first days, they probably could not have survived without this brotherly succor. Even more so, the South needs the sustenance and inspiration of the national labor movement. Unionism, as Philip Murray said in 1946, is indeed a first class instrument of penetration. It can be the opening wedge of a generalized reorganization. The labor movement, however, will never succeed by bureaucratic extension but only when it becomes the carrier of a great social idea as it was in the crusading mid-thirties. As in other fields, labor will not get its stalled engine re-started until it gets itself supplied with a new set of programmatic sparkplugs.

## IV

### 14. American Exceptionalism

The revisionist schools of Marxist writers have long recognized the special characteristics of the American labor movement, but have generally viewed them as representing a time lag. They thought that with growing economic stratification, class feelings would harden and the American pattern would resemble the European one. In the light of the events of the first half of the twentieth century, it takes no great perspicacity to understand that even these writers vastly underestimated the ability of capitalism, and especially American capitalism, to expand and hand out bigger cuts of pie. But the error goes beyond an inadequate appreciation of the powers of this particular pre-eminent capitalism. There was also an exaggeration of the socialist militancy of the European labor movements. The fact is that the modern Left movements in Western Europe, which for decades have embraced huge portions of the working peoples, appear as little prepared to challenge the existence of capitalism today as they were at the time of their formation. Beneath the more radical-appearing institutional forms, there also reside in Europe working classes trained to pressure the powers-that-be for small improvements within the existing system, and they are likewise caught in the coils of nationalism when the ruling authorities call for allegiance against the foreign foe. The watchword of the Irish used to be, "England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity"; but the watchword of the European working classes has been that they are Englishmen, Frenchmen, Germans, and Swedes first, and socialists second.

It used to be thought in the pre-World War I days that the German Socialist Party represented the most leftward section of the Socialist International, and that the British Labor Party represented the most conservative. When the war broke out, it was discovered that although the former paid homage to Marx and Lasalle, and the latter to William Morris and the Sermon on the Mount, beneath the ideological froth the two movements possessed similar character-

istics and responded with almost identical reflexes once the nationalist war drums started to roll. There is a bit of an analogy in this concerning the relations of the West European and American movements today. The former are committed to socialism, while the latter still adheres to capitalism. But the question arises perforce whether there is not much similarity of impulse, temperament, and outlook beneath the considerable disparities in institutional forms and historical development.

There is no inclination here to wave away the more advanced status of the European movements. This is solid fact. The class consciousness of the British or French worker is by no means a fictitious thing, nor is his socialism a mere matter of conventionality and formal tradition. But capitalism has been able by a diabolical combination of benefits and sanctions, by manipulation of ancient loyalties while playing upon dangers and divisions, to drain the opposition of sustained militancy and purposeful socialist leadership. The workers are against capitalism all right, but they generally do not feel sufficiently aroused about the issue to storm the heavens. Leaders get caught up in a debilitating atmosphere. Even when they start as firebrands, they get tired in middle age of beating their heads against the seemingly impregnable establishment, and settle down as moderate reformers. Corruption of the European labor movements never assumes the barbaric American forms of trade union officials siphoning off treasuries, accepting bribes from employers, or entering into conspiracies with the underworld. But the British rulers are past masters at the game of taming their labor leaders by conferring peerages, and in the other countries techniques of envelopment have been perfected of equal efficacy. Hence, despite the different ideologies, and the gap in institutional forms and administrative practices, we find an amazing parallelism in the conduct of the two labor movements, especially since the CIO-ization of the American trade unions. In the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the Americans and Europeans quarrel over personnel arrangements and over who is to pay the bills, but they are cheek by jowl on basic perspectives and working practices. The American labor movement is exceptional still in lacking its own political organization, but the degree of exceptionality is not as immense as used to be thought or as was true in the past.

Do not let us conclude from this slow and enormously difficult evolution that the socialist goal is a chimera, and hence write off the working class as incapable of transcending the role of a pressure group within capitalist society. Three quarters of a century is longer than the life span of most individuals; it is but a moment on the scale of history. And we can hope to see the drift in reasonable perspective only by eschewing personal measuring rods. The immense labor structures that have been erected in all Western countries prove that Marx knew what he was talking about when he said that modern industry would convert the working classes into disciplined armies. Modern industry has unfortunately also stupefied the workers, limited their horizons, and numbed their ambitions.

The prognosis that the turn to socialism would begin in the industrialized West has been confounded, as has the later socialist notion that the labor movements would simply not tolerate the continuation of a system that brought on the horror of world wars. Organization, tenacity, and adaptability have been stronger elements of labor's armor than audacity and vision. Furthermore, the amount of labor internationalism that can be attained under capitalism and the existence of national states is far slighter than socialist idealism was wont to concede. Each labor movement proceeds at its own tempo, rests on its own tradition, and is moved by its own specific requirements. No two labor movements—even those of Western Europe that have similarities in their historical conditioning—are wholly alike. While an overall line of progress can be drawn in the case of the British and American labor movements, it is more difficult to derive any ascending curve from the violent oscillations of the French and German movements in the past half century, which at times rose to heights of resoluteness, and at other times sank to depths of apathy and demoralization.

But the persistence of these huge organizations of labor, which come back despite setback or defeat, whether it be the American unions' re-creation after the AFL disintegration of the twenties, or the British Labor Party's resurgence after the Ramsay MacDonald debacle of 1931, or the German movement's phoenix-like rise from the ashes of Hitler's Germany, can only be explained by the deep, subterranean urge on the part of the labor masses to protest against the inequities of an exploitative system and to aim, however clumsily

and inefficiently, for a more humane ordering of civilization. Their very tenacity over the years is an augury that there is a continuous molecular process at work which in its totality spells a recurring attempt to find a way of breaking through the confines of a system grown reactionary and destructive in its decline. Trade union leaders, especially the American, like to give the impression that the statesmanlike postures that they publicly strike are the true highlights of labor's progress and that the needs of their members have been largely solved, or at the very least, are on the way to solution. But the grey mass of workers in the background does not feel that way about labor's affairs, for despite all the gains of laborism, the alienation and brutalization of the work process has remained basically unchanged in our mass production society. It continues to goad the worker to try again and again to break out of his inferior status.

Since no one has yet discovered a new social force—although there have been many attempts to do so—which can usher the necessary, and as a matter of fact, inevitable social changes into our rudderless industrial society now gone amuck, the conviction must be retained that after sufficient trial and error, the labor movements, each in their own way and time, will rise to the historic needs of our epoch. At any rate, this is a consummation devoutly to be wished and pursued, for if labor proves incapable of playing the role of a leader in the transition to reorganize a sick society along rational lines, the alternative will not be an indefinite continuation of the present quasi-liberalistic society in the West, but either a decline of our civilization by exhaustion and destruction in war, or the historic transference of social creativeness to the East.



# THE CONDITION OF THE WORKING CLASS

BY PAUL M. SWEETZ

The effect of disarmament on employment and the national prosperity cast a deep shadow on the sixth IAM aircraft and guided missiles conference last week. As the 165 delegates were reminded, about one out of every three jobs in the United States is directly or indirectly dependent on defense spending.

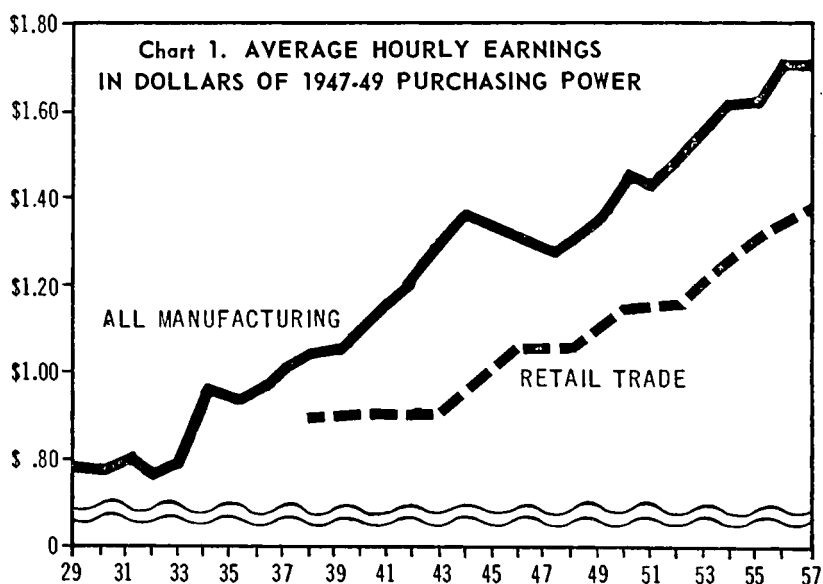
*Machinist,*  
publication of the  
AFL-CIO International  
Association of Machinists,  
July 4, 1957

MUCH has been written in recent years about the "American standard of living," the "income revolution," the "conquest of poverty," and the like. In this literature, American capitalism has become the workers' paradise which socialists were once scornfully derided for holding up as a vain and utopian hope to the toiling masses. How much of all this is fact and how much more or less deliberately fabricated ideology is a most complicated and difficult question which obviously cannot be answered in a few pages. And yet I think it is possible, even in very brief compass, to present enough of the answer so that the problem can be seen in its true proportions. And if I am right that clarity on this whole range of topics is a matter of the greatest importance for the American Left (in which I include the labor movement), then at any rate no apologies need be offered for making the attempt.

Most of the facts and figures to be presented are compressed into a few simple charts the data for which are taken, unless otherwise specified, from *Economic Indicators* (both the latest number and the 1957 Historical and Descriptive Supplement), a useful and authoritative statistical compilation published monthly by the President's Council of Economic Advisers.

### Hourly Earnings

Chart 1 shows average hourly earnings in dollars of 1947-1949 purchasing power. The series for manufacturing extends back to 1929; for retail trade, which is included for purposes of comparison, to 1939. Considering all the changes and upheavals of the period, the picture is one of remarkably steady progress. The big exceptions are, first, the Great Depression and, second, the three years from 1944 to 1947 comprising the end of the war and the reversion to peacetime conditions. For the rest, the gains of the thirties are fully as impressive as the gains of the forties and fifties.



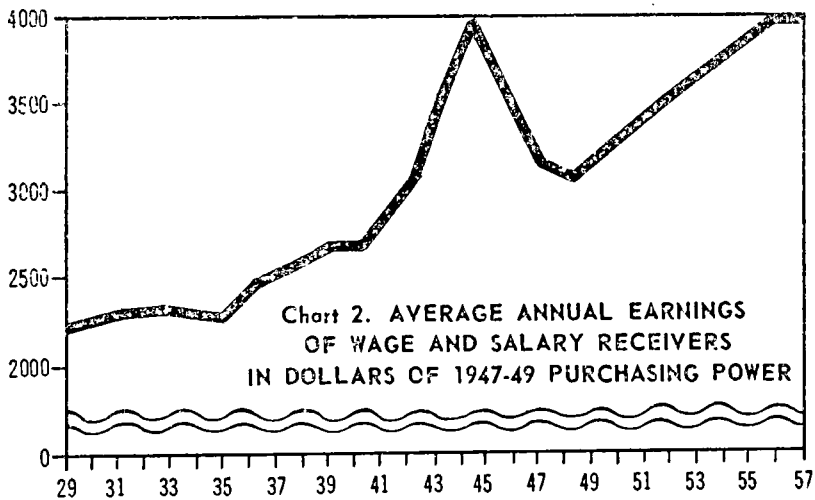
As between manufacturing and retail trade, the latter is not only lower throughout but the spread widens: In 1939 hourly earnings in retail trade were 85 percent of manufacturing; in 1957, 80 percent.

There are several reasons for this, as Professor Dowd shows in his article on white collar workers elsewhere in this book, but I think we would probably be safe in attributing the main role to the greater degree of unionization among manufacturing workers.

The fact that hourly earnings increased as rapidly during the depressed thirties as during the booming forties and fifties clearly suggests that if there has been a significant change in the condition of the working class in recent years it must have been caused by factors other than a simple rise in wage rates.

Annual Earnings

Chart 2, showing average annual earnings of wage and salary receivers in dollars of 1947-1949 purchasing power, presents a very different and at first sight quite paradoxical picture. Here the increase during the thirties is very slow, and a change that can without exaggeration be called of revolutionary magnitude takes place during the war. Thereafter, there is a sharp decline followed by a gradual recovery which did not regain the 1945 peak again until 1956!\*



\* This runs so counter to current notions that some readers may wish to check the figures for themselves. The procedure is simple: Take compensation of employees as shown in national income, divide by the number of wage and salary workers as shown under the heading of nonagricultural employment, and divide by the consumers price index with 1947-1949=1.00.

The explanation of this different pattern, of course, is that annual earnings depend on both hourly earnings and the total time worked, and that during the war both the steadiness of employment and the numbers of hours per week increased sharply.

The fact that annual earnings reached a wartime peak of approximately \$4000 which has only been equalled in the last two years does not mean that the realized material standard of living was as high during the war as it has been since. For one thing, much of wartime monetary income was saved at the time and spent later, so that the actual enjoyment did not coincide with the receipt of income;\* and for another, a large proportion of consumer durable goods bought since the war (especially houses and automobiles) has been financed through borrowing rather than from income. On the other hand, more members of the family were likely to be working during the war, so that for large strata of the working class, particularly those in the lower income ranges, actual realized standards of living were at their maximum during the war years. Chart 2 must be interpreted with care, but the message it conveys is none the less authentic and important: at least in the short run, the purchasing power which the worker has at his disposal depends first and foremost on the amount of work he can get.

It should be noted that substantially the same story is told by the figures on average net spendable weekly earnings of manufacturing workers. In 1939, a worker with three dependents had just under \$40 of 1947-1949 purchasing power to spend. This rose by almost 50 percent to a wartime maximum of nearly \$59 in 1944, then declined in the same manner as annual earnings, and finally surpassed the wartime figure in 1955, reaching a postwar peak of \$63 in 1956. Here the postwar maximum is a mere 7 percent above the figure reached during the war years.\*\*

### Unemployment

This brings us to the related subject of unemployment. The next two charts show unemployment in absolute numbers (Chart 3) and

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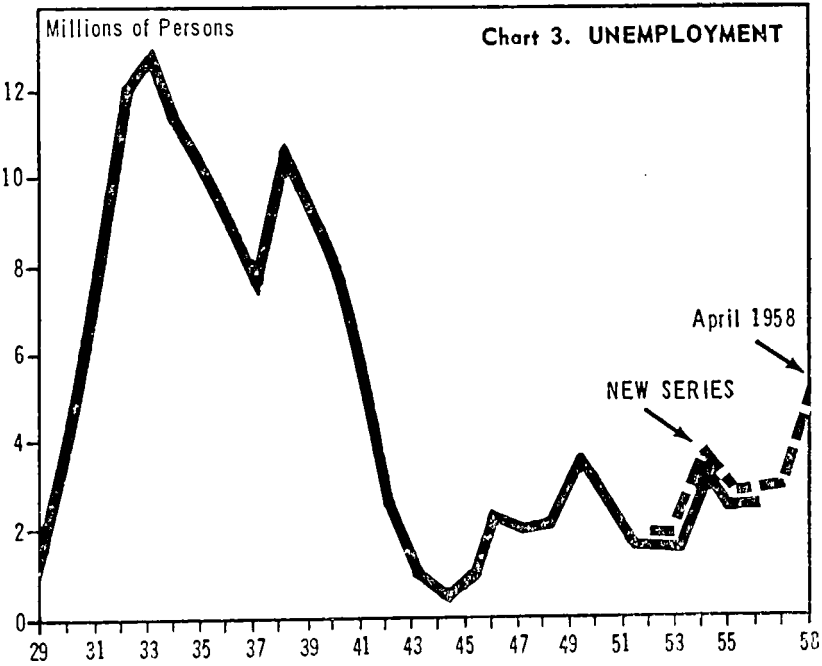
\* The abandonment of price controls after the war, resulting in a rapid rise of prices, robbed workers of a considerable part of the real purchasing power of their wartime savings.

\*\* These figures are from the Bureau of Labor Statistics monthly releases on "Employment and Earnings."

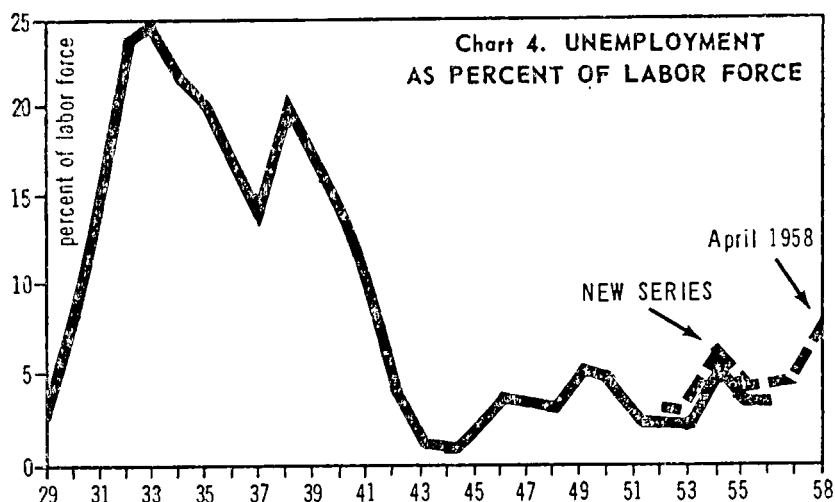
as a percent of the labor force (Chart 4). The figures are an understatement throughout (even in the case of the new series beginning in 1952), but they undoubtedly give an accurate indication of the major fluctuations.

Unemployment shot up with the Great Depression and remained high during the whole decade of the thirties. It then plummeted to under a million during the war and has since then been slowly and with interruptions, but none the less surely, creeping back up again—a trend which shows up very clearly in both charts.

But for the cold war, needless to say, unemployment would have been much more severe in the postwar period, and weekly and annual earnings figures would doubtless have recovered from their post-war slump much less rapidly and completely than they actually have.

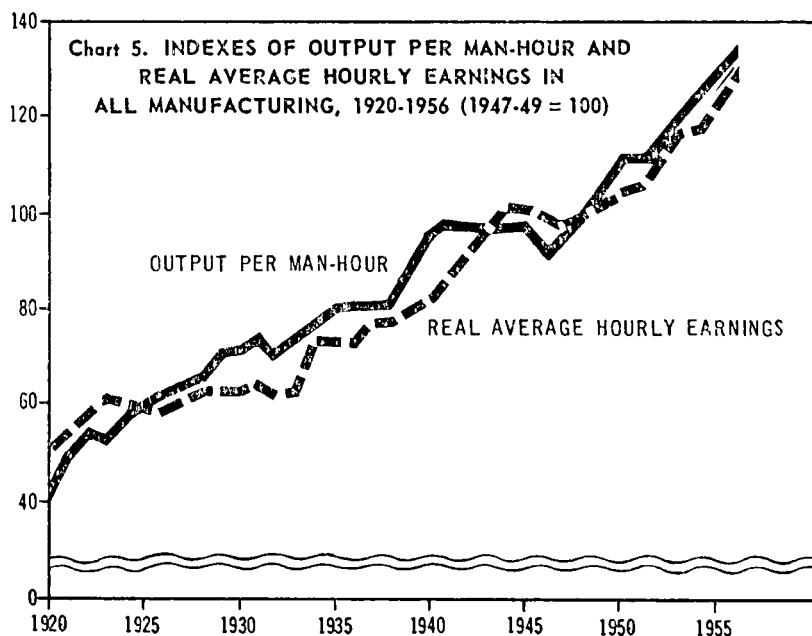


But the thing to be stressed in the light of the 1958 depression, as we look ahead rather than back, is that unemployment has been making a comeback for a long time and has now again attained the status of a chronic disease.



### Labor Income and Productivity

Since there has been much discussion in recent years about the relation between wages and productivity, it seems appropriate to include Chart 5 showing indexes of output per man-hour (productivity) and real average hourly earnings in all manufacturing. It shows that



except for two relatively brief periods during the early twenties and again at the end of the war and in the first years of peace, output per man-hour has consistently exceeded hourly earnings, and that ever since the war output has increased more rapidly than earnings. These figures are taken from a detailed report entitled *Productivity, Prices, and Incomes* put out in 1957 by the Joint Economic Committee, in which it is also shown that substantially the same relation between productivity and labor costs is obtained by using more refined measurements.

Note that these figures pertain to all manufacturing and thus include a large part of the economy's *productive* workers. Figures purporting to show the productivity of the *entire* labor force have little or no meaning since a large and growing proportion of American workers, typified by the salesman and advertiser, have nothing whatever to do with the production of goods and services (or utilities either, for that matter) and are paid merely for their role in helping to turn goods into money. To speak, as bourgeois economics does, of the "productivity" of such unproductive workers is a contradiction in terms and can lead only to confusion or nonsense or both.

### The So-Called Income Revolution

In 1953, Professor Simon Kuznets, a pioneer in the field of national income and product statistics, published a work entitled *Shares of Upper Income Groups in Income and Savings* (National Bureau of Economic Research) which purported to show that the share of total income accruing to the richest five percent of income receivers had decreased from 32.2 percent in 1929 to 19.4 percent in 1948, a drop of no less than 40 percent in two decades. This alleged decline in the share of the very rich, widely interpreted as proof of growing economic equality, has taken its place in the literature of what C. Wright Mills calls the American celebration as the "income revolution."

This is not the place for an evaluation of Kuznets' results. Suffice it to say that they have been subjected to a good deal of expert criticism, after reading which one can conclude on perfectly reasonable grounds that the "income revolution" is partly, largely, or even entirely a statistical illusion stemming from the fact that the very

rich appropriate a large and growing share of the nation's output of goods and services not in the form of personal income but in a variety of institutionalized forms (corporate savings, unrealized capital gains, expense accounts, deferred payment plans, corporate and government services, and so on).<sup>\*</sup> But suppose we concede for the sake of the argument that there has indeed been an important reduction in the share of the top income group and in this sense an increase in economic equality. We find then that the change took place as it were in two steps. The first, from 1929 to 1939, would have to be explained in terms of the social and fiscal reforms of the New Deal. The second step took place during the war and would be due to price control and the achievement of full employment. The war period undoubtedly did bring a real improvement to the low income groups; since the war, however, there is *no* statistical evidence of a further trend to greater equality. To quote Mrs. Goldsmith:

A salient point is that for the lowest 40 percent of consumer units, the period of greatest relative gains was between 1941 and 1944. Since 1944, there has been little change in the relative distribution of family income according to available figures. (*op. cit.*, p. 507.)

This means, of course, that to the extent that the upper class has expanded its "institutionalized income," there has actually been an increase in economic *inequality* since the war.

Thus the "income revolution," if indeed it ever took place, was all over before Roosevelt died. On this point, needless to say, the minstrels of the American celebration maintain a discreet silence.

## Negro and White

One of the crucial aspects of the condition of the American working class is the relation between Negro and white workers. I

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<sup>\*</sup> By far the best summary of the basic statistics and the critical literature which has grown up around them will be found in Selma F. Goldsmith, "Changes in the Size Distribution of Income," *American Economic Review*, May 1957 (Papers and Proceedings of the 69th Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association). Mrs. Goldsmith is chief of Department of Commerce work on income distribution and the country's leading authority on the subject.

The best discussion of the newer forms of institutionalized appropriation is in C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, especially Chapter 7.



know of no recent statistical study of this subject, but the general picture has certainly not changed radically since publication in 1952 of the Department of Labor's Bulletin No. 1119, *Negroes in the United States: Their Employment and Economic Status*. Two tables from this study tell the essential story.

Table 1 shows the median wage and salary income of workers by color in 1939 and 1947-1950:

Table 1

Year	Nonwhite	White	Nonwhite as a percent of white
1939	\$ 364	\$ 956	38.1
1947	863	1,980	43.6
1948	1,210	2,323	52.1
1949	1,064	2,350	45.3
1950	1,295	2,481	52.2

Table 2 shows the percent of workers unemployed by color in 1947, 1949, and 1951:

Table 2

Year	Nonwhite	White	Nonwhite as a percent of white
1947	5.4	3.3	163.6
1949	8.2	5.2	157.7
1951	4.8	2.8	171.4

There has been some improvement in the relative income of Negro workers since prewar times, but as late as 1950 it was still hardly more than half of white income; and in the recession year 1949, when unemployment went up sharply, the ratio of Negro to white incomes slumped just as sharply. Further, unemployment is always much heavier among Negroes than among whites. Clearly, the material condition of black workers is still far inferior to that of their white brothers.

## Two Conclusions

The foregoing facts and figures are intended to be presented in such a way as not only to permit but encourage the reader to draw his own conclusions. I will mention only the two which struck me most forcibly as I reviewed the material:

(1) Marx was absolutely right to stress the decisive importance of the reserve army of labor, which was his term for unemployment, to the material and moral condition of the working class. The last three decades have indeed witnessed a large rise in the level of workers' real incomes, but most of it occurred during World War II and was directly associated with the achievement of really full employment in those years. Now that unemployment is again returning to "normal" (for capitalism), we can venture the forecast that the era of important workers' gains has ended. And we may hope that this foreshadows the rebirth of labor militancy on both economic and political fronts.

(2) Since only war has been able to produce full employment under capitalism, it follows that most of what the workers have gained during these years they have owed indirectly to war. Sooner or later, American workers will have to face up to the implications of this fact. Do they want to restore full employment, with its concomitant advantages to them, through more war? Or will they finally comprehend the terrible cruelty and irrationality of such a course and set themselves the arduous but rewarding task of building a new social order in which both employment and incomes will be under the planned control of the society of producers?

# A NOTE ON CULTURAL EXPLOITATION

BY HARVEY SWADOS

You can tell the ideals of a nation  
by its advertisements.

George Norman Douglas,  
*South Wind*

THOSE of us who persist in clinging to certain archaic notions about the human degradation attendant upon capitalism, and who in consequence cannot shake off the suspicion that this might be a better world with the arrival of something we call socialism, are often taxed with the lack of foresight of Karl Marx. Not only is Marx held posthumously accountable for all the crimes committed in his name or in the name of socialism—from the Stalinist slave-labor camps to the Socialist management of imperialist pacification in Algeria—but he is also charged with having failed to foresee that capitalism would be able to provide not less and less, but more and more of the good things of life for its proletariat. It is true that in recent months these sardonic cries have become somewhat muted, as the unemployed are once again arrested for stealing food and display other signs of reluctance to proceed quietly from overemployment to home relief; but still the claim is made that the working class under capitalism (especially in Magic America), far from being increasingly exploited and degraded, is living at least as well as anyone else in the world, if not better.

Well, what about it? Are we to deny that the packinghouse

worker and the auto worker can and do buy color television, three-taillight automobiles and Chris Crafts to go with their fishing licenses? And if we admit it, shouldn't we also admit that capitalism is after all capable of satisfying all the wants of the underlying population, allowing for occasional recessions?

I for one do not think so. I for one think that the working class is not having its basic emotional wants and psychological needs satisfied. I for one think that the working class—regardless of whether it is envied by other proletarians who would like to drive cars instead of bicycles, or who would like to ride bicycles instead of walking—is being cheated, swindled, and degraded as ferociously as ever its English counterparts were a century ago when Marx and Engels were anatomizing them. The fact that it may not be aware of its exploitation does not alter the reality of its situation. The fact that, even with an appreciable portion of it presently subsisting on unemployment insurance, its material status is still light years ahead of its European (to say nothing of its Asian or African) counterparts, is relevant only as it sheds a little light on the potential of plenty that would be available to all mankind if industrialization and the accumulation of capital were to take place at a rational pace on a world-wide basis.

Consider the condition, say, of the Chicago slaughterhouse worker at the turn of the century. Upton Sinclair railed magnificently, and with ultimately telling effect, not only at the economic subjugation of workers forced to toil sixty and seventy hours a week for a pittance, but also at the conditions under which they worked, at *what* they had to do for a living, and at *how* they were ruthlessly cleaned out in the saloons when the long day's work was done. It was his contention that the workers were being degraded and enslaved not only during their working hours, but afterward as well, when they turned to the consolation of booze to help them forget how they were spending their lives.

Let us grant at once that these workers are no longer forced to toil (not even the moonlighters) sixty and seventy hours a week. Let us grant at once that they are paid much more for working much less than they did at the turn of the century, and that, thanks to their union, their conditions of employment have been immeasurably improved. *What* they do does not seem to have altered as appreciably.

Since Chicago packinghouses no longer offer public guided tours, let us note what was said very recently by one of America's most distinguished women, who felt impelled, in her ninth decade, to address a letter to the *New York Times* (April 30, 1958):

I have been horrified within the last few weeks by learning that the old cruel way of slaughtering animals for food is still being widely used, and that still, just as in my youth, there is no law to forbid it. This is to me absolutely incomprehensible because we are not a cruel people: we do not want to eat what comes to us through pain and suffering. And yet, as I know of my own knowledge, the facts about the slaughterhouses were investigated and publicized well on to sixty years ago. . . .

Miss Edith Hamilton does not dwell in her letter on the effects of this cruel work on those hired to perform it, nor need we linger here over the question beyond observing that it is not one currently asked by those engaged in promulgating the myth of the happy worker.

As for *how* workers are gulled and mulcted in the hangouts which Sinclair described as traps designed to stupefy the worker, and which we today might characterize as the liquid television of half a century ago, only those who live in the dream world of official mythology imagine that they no longer fulfill the evil function they did in the days of *The Jungle*.

An armored truck [A. H. Raskin tells us in the *New York Times Magazine* of May 4, 1958] stood outside the unemployment insurance office in a down-at-the-heels neighborhood five minutes ride from Detroit's glistening civic center. On the truck's side was a sign: "Charge for cashing checks. Up to \$50—15 cents. Over \$50—20 cents." Two-thirds of the workers streaming out of the office thrust their checks through the slot and paid tribute to the man in the truck. . . . Inside the office the manager frowned: "That armored truck is violating the law, but the cops don't bother the owner. And the wives like it, it keeps their men out of the beer gardens to cash their checks."

But new techniques for the inducement of oblivion have far outstripped the traditional saloon, with its check-cashing window and its soft-sell technique of simultaneously taking the worker's money and enabling him to forget that he has just spent his day hitting

screaming animals on the head, tightening bolts on auto bodies, or seeking the opportunity to find such employment. Indeed the new techniques of merchandizing both "leisure" and forgetfulness have now developed to the point where they can be said to play as large a part in the degradation of the worker as does his actual employment. The English writer, Richard Hoggart, puts the matter quite succinctly in his *The Uses of Literacy* (Fairlawn, New Jersey, 1957):

Inhibited now from ensuring the "degradation" of the masses economically, the logical processes of competitive commerce, favored from without by the whole climate of the time and from within assisted by the lack of direction, the doubts and uncertainty before their freedom of working people themselves (and maintained as much by ex-working class writers as by others), are ensuring that working people are culturally robbed. Since these processes can never rest, the holding down, the constant pressure not to work outwards and upwards, becomes a positive thing, becomes a new and stronger form of subjection; this subjection promises to be stronger than the old because the chains of cultural subordination are both easier to wear and harder to strike away than those of economic subordination. . . . (pp. 200-201.)

What is perhaps ugliest about the whole process, however, is that competitive commerce is now meshing the chains of cultural subordination with those of economic subordination. The worker is not simply lulled into forgetfulness of his daily idiot routine by the TV western: he is simultaneously pressured into permanently mortgaging himself by acquiring the objects manufactured by the sponsors of his daily ration of opiates. The peddlers of persuasion have now developed such techniques of sophistication and grown themselves into such large-scale enterprise that they engage the talents and the creative passions of a substantial segment of young college graduates in the fields of sociology, psychology, economics, and the English language itself. They regard the worker-consumer as a manipulable object rather than as a human being with individual needs and aspirations; they address him in consequence with a cynicism that can only be described as shameless, and they exploit him culturally as ruthlessly as he was exploited economically a generation ago. Thus Dr. Ernst Dichter, president of the Institute for Motivational Research, recently informed the Sales Executives Club of New York and

the Advertising Federation of America:

A year ago it was correct to advertise the purchase of air-conditioners under the slogan, "You deserve to sleep in comfort." Today, it may be psychologically more correct to shift to a moral approach, utilizing spartan, work-oriented appeals such as, "You can't afford to be tired all day," or "You work better and produce more after a refreshing night." Dr. Dichter termed this one approach for giving the consumer "moral permission" and "a rational justification" for buying products that represent the "good life." . . . Motivation research's view on price cuts, according to Dr. Dichter, is that they must be accompanied by advertisements that explain to the consumer the reasons for the change. Otherwise, "there is a grave danger that the consumer will become more than ever convinced that he was being cheated during a period of prosperity." Dr. Dichter also urged that salesmen become philosophers as well. To help dispel the sales lag, "he has to sell us not only a product but the desirability, the correctness of purchasing the product." (*New York Times*, March 19, 1958.)

Those who manage to accommodate themselves to a lunatic order of things have in general reacted to observations like those in the preceding paragraphs in one or a combination of the three following ways:

(1) They assert that the great virtue in our social order is that, in addition to providing the working class with the necessities and the amenities of a secure and civilized existence, it also provides the worker for the first time in history with an unparalleled variety of cultural possibilities, ranging from the great thinkers in inexpensive paper books to the great composers on inexpensive LP's.

(2) They claim that the manufacturers of distraction are giving the public what it wants, and that if the proletarian turns in his off-hours not to Plato but to Spillane, not to Beethoven but to Alan Freed, this is no more than a reflection of the traditionally abominable taste of the masses, which preceded and will endure beyond the current American order.

(3) They point out that—if it is indeed true that we are the victims of an unremitting, concerted commercial assault on our nerves and our senses—this degrading and relentless battering affects not just the working class but all of us, and that it is therefore romantically

inaccurate to single out the proletarian as the particularly exploited victim of the mass-media panderers.

All three defenses are interconnected; a response to all must start with an insistence upon the lately neglected fact that it is the man on the bottom of the heap, the man who does the dirty work, who has the fewest defenses against the unending barrage of sex and violence and the propaganda of commerce. He *is* the particularly exploited victim of the mass media; he is *not* given an honest possibility of developing an individual taste for individual works of the human imagination; he does *not* have the range of cultural choice available to college students, white-collar people, and middle-class citizens of the republic.

As Daniel Bell observes of the work situation itself, in his *Work and Its Discontents* (Boston, 1956, p. 38), "a tension that is enervating or debilitating can only produce wildly aggressive play, or passive, unresponsive viewing. To have 'free time' one needs the zest of a challenging day, not the exhaustion of a blank one. If work is a daily turn round Ixion's wheel, can the intervening play be anything more than a restless moment before the next turn of the wheel?"

The man who leaves the packinghouse or the assembly line is neither physically nor psychically prepared to appreciate the quality paperback or the classical LP. Nor are they readily available to him in any case; the merchandisers of the mass entertainments reserve the right to restrict certain of their wares, or conversely to cram others down the gullets of their victims. It is no more accidental that the only civilized TV programs are presented on Sundays, when the average viewer is either sleeping it off or visiting relatives, than it is that the much-touted bookracks in the poorer neighborhoods are packed not with Plato but with anonymously mass-produced borderline sado-pornography.

It is not only that the mass-media exploiters are capitalizing on the cultural backwardness of the great majority of the American people. Worse: they are actively engaged in the *creation* of new types of subliterate (see the paperback racks), sub-music (radio and juke-boxes), and generally sub-human activities (television), which they dump on a defenseless public in saturation quantities. No demand can be said to exist for such products of greedy and distorted minds until they are first created and then reiterated to the point of nausea



or numbed acceptance. In the process of production and reiteration, whatever remains of an independent, traditional working class culture—as Mr. Hoggart spells it out painstakingly in *The Uses of Literacy*—is gradually eroded.

The middle classes and the intelligentsia can at least be said to have alternative choices for their leisure hours. Thanks to the numerical increase of the college-educated and to their steadily increasing purchasing power, the masters of mass consumption have made available to them the cultural treasures of the ages through the media of books, records, and even FM stations. But these have not been, nor will they be, addressed to the working class, to the vast inarticulate masses, who are deemed by their betters to have lower tastes than the primitive Africans and Asians to whom the State Department exports Marian Anderson and Louis Armstrong. What could be at once more patronizing and more bankrupt than the claim that the flood of swill daily pumped through our cultural pipelines fairly represents all that the ordinary man can ever be expected to appreciate? If it is true that this capitalist society has all but wiped out economic degradation and oppression, why can it produce only consumers assertedly hungry for cultural products as degraded as those of any previous epoch of human history? The fantastic technological and scientific advances of recent years—not the singular product, we see now all too clearly, of American capitalism—do not merely call for an accompanying cultural advance, up to now unobservable among us; they will be positively insupportable without such an advance, without a new definition of the meaning of culture and of the individual human potential.

Meanwhile the fact of the apparent hunger for cultural rubbish combined with the salesman's pitch, and their apparent mass acceptance, should not blind us to the basic shabbiness of the degradation and the exploitation of those who, all too unaware of what is being done to them, may even be asking for more of the same. I must turn once again to Richard Hoggart, who speaks to the point on this matter:

If the active minority continue to allow themselves too exclusively to think of immediate political and economic objectives, the pass will be sold, culturally, behind their backs. This is a harder problem in some ways than even that which confronted

their predecessors. It is harder to realize imaginatively the dangers of spiritual deterioration. Those dangers are harder to combat, like adversaries in the air, with no corporeal shapes to inspire courage and decision. These things are enjoyed by the very people whom one believes to be adversely affected by them. It is easier for a few to improve the material conditions of many than for a few to waken a great many from the hypnosis of immature emotional satisfactions. People in this situation have somehow to be taught to help themselves. (*op. cit.*, p. 264.)

It should not be discouraging that there are few voices like Mr. Hoggart's on this side of the Atlantic. Surely it is better to speak late than not to speak at all, and by one's silence ensure the continuing and intensified exploitation of those least able to resist its seductive and ultimately corrupting effects. Every voice which says "No" is itself a demonstration of the existence of an alternative to the cultural degradation of the masses.

# NO MORE CLASS WAR?

BY LEO HUBERMAN

Peace, peace; when there is no  
peace.

*Jeremiah, VI:14*

**O**N November 28, 1953, a testimonial dinner was held in the city of Pittsburgh in honor of Mr. David J. McDonald, President of the United Steelworkers of America, CIO. Present on that historic occasion, one of the many featured speakers gathered to pay honor to the leader of the union, was Mr. Benjamin F. Fairless, Chairman of the Board of the United States Steel Corporation. Mr. McDonald, head of the largest steelworkers' union in the world, and Mr. Fairless, head of the largest steel company in the world, had just returned from a two-week tour of the steel plants. Mr. Fairless thought that the "program of plant visitations" which he and his colleague had inaugurated was a very good idea. He reported to the assembled dinner company:

We have also had an opportunity to look beyond the immediate issues that divide us, and to see in much better perspective, I think, the one overshadowing task that confronts all of us today: the task of finding a road that leads to industrial peace. (Benjamin Fairless, *The Task Ahead*, United States Steel Corporation, New York.)

Having stated the problem, Mr. Fairless went on to give his solution:

It can be accomplished very simply, I think, if we can ever rid ourselves of the utterly false idea that our economic interests are in conflict and that therefore we must always try to take something away from each other.

Actually, of course, our interests are identical. For better or worse, we are inseparably bound together in a state of economic matrimony.

It comes as no surprise, of course, to hear from the lips of an employer that the economic interests of workers and employers are identical. Nor would it be surprising to learn that many of the workers in the audience (if indeed there were any present) believed with Fairless that there is no class conflict. For that is the message which the current crop of labor leaders have been preaching to them for some time. Thus the *International Musician*, organ of the American Federation of Musicians, ran excerpts of the Fairless speech in its February 1954 issue, with this foreword: "The sentiments contained therein are practically identical with the thoughts expressed by President Petrillo at numerous conventions of the Federation, to the effect that the interests of the employer and employee are bound together and that each needs the other, and instead of antagonizing each other they should endeavor to cooperate."

The editor's claim that Petrillo had already said it at "numerous conventions of the Federation" is probably true, but there is no doubt at all that Dave Beck, now outside the pale, but then General President of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, beat employer Fairless to the lovefest by almost three months. In his Labor Day statement of September 7, 1953, Beck said:

We call upon industry to join with labor in ushering in a new era of labor-management cooperation.

If labor and management could rid themselves of old-fashioned—actually Marxian—notions that they are forever locked in bitter opposition . . . then our country would soar to new heights of accomplishment.

The key to this magnificent future is not industrial peace, which implies a compact between warring factions, but industrial fellowship, based on common understanding for a common goal.

There are some employers who would look with cynicism at Petrillo's plea for cooperation and Beck's clarion call for "industrial fellowship." They would demand "deeds not words." To the most hardboiled employers in America, the members of the National Association of Manufacturers, in convention assembled in New York (December 1956) came a leader of labor who could satisfactorily answer this demand for "deeds not words." Where could one find better credentials for a top labor leader anxiously disassociating himself from the thought of class struggle than these from George Meany:

I never went on strike in my life, never ran a strike in my life, never ordered anyone else to run a strike in my life, never had anything to do with a picket line. . . .

In the final analysis, there is not a great difference between the things I stand for and the things that NAM leaders stand for. I stand for the profit system; I believe in the profit system. I believe it's a wonderful incentive. I believe in the free enterprise system completely.

Meany's junior partner in running the AFL-CIO is Walter Reuther, President of the United Automobile Workers. The *New York Times* of March 28, 1958, quotes Reuther as saying: "We don't believe in the class struggle. The labor movement in America has never believed in the class struggle."

We must accept the first sentence of Reuther's statement as a true expression of his beliefs. But about the second sentence there is some dispute. At any rate, the founders of the AFL, writing in 1886, certainly had an awareness of the existence of the class struggle since this is what they put into the Preamble to the Constitution of the American Federation of Labor:

Whereas, a struggle is going on in all the nations of the civilized world between the oppressors and the oppressed of all countries, a struggle between the capitalist and the laborer, which grows in intensity from year to year, and will work disastrous results to the toiling millions if they are not combined for mutual protection and benefit. . . .

In the minds of Meany and other AFL leaders this Preamble had long been out of date, so when the AFL and CIO merged in

1955, a new Preamble to the Constitution of the combined organizations was written which contained no hint of class conflict.

The class war, however, cannot be so easily swept under the rug. It may be what Dave Beck called "old-fashioned" and "Marxian" but it does exist—and all the talk by the Fairlesses and the labor leaders about the harmony between capital and labor will not make it disappear. In capitalist society there can be no such harmony because what is of benefit to one class comes out of the pocket of the other, and vice versa. The individual capitalist may want to raise wages, but to the extent that he does, he cuts into his profits. And if he cuts into his profits too much, he'll have to go out of business.

It is true, of course, that if a capitalist owns his own plant and wants to play Santa Claus to his workers, no one can stop him. And there may be a few eccentrics of this kind. But today most business is carried on by big corporations, and if the management of a corporation should try to behave that way, the stockholders could go to court and get an order prohibiting the squandering of the owners' assets. In a system of corporate capitalism, in other words, the law *requires* businessmen to devote themselves to one end and one end only, the making of the greatest possible profit. And with that end in view, it is natural for the employers to resist wage increases by whatever means possible.

These are the facts of capitalist life, clear to intelligent non-Marxists as well as Marxists. Here, for example, is what the Brookings Institution, the most conservative of the respectable economic research organizations, had to say on the subject almost a quarter of a century ago:

For each particular business man, wages constitute one of the most important elements of cost; hence if he can reduce wage rates, he can gain a differential advantage over his competitors. Whatever the ultimate general results, there is immediate gain for the individual business enterprise which can reduce wages below the existing market rate.

Increases in wages above the market rate are resisted for similar reasons. As a general proposition, every individual business concern hesitates to advance its wages above the market level. The reason is obvious in cases where the margin of profit is slight; since competition cannot be met if prices are raised, an increase in wages threatens bankruptcy. But in the case of companies

which have profit margins sufficient to permit an expansion of wages without an increase of prices, there are deterring considerations.

To pay more than the market rate for wages appears not only needless but also unstabilizing in its effects upon business generally. Moreover, the very essence of competition is to pay what has to be paid and not more. Why should one ignore market considerations when he hires labor anymore than when he buys raw materials? . . .

Wage increases as a rule are granted only under pressure—exerted by a general scarcity of labor or by the power of labor organizations. (*Income and Economic Progress*, Washington, D. C., 1935, pp. 110-112.)

It is because wage increases are won “by the power of labor organizations” that employers have made war on labor unions in the past and why they continue to carry on that war in the present. That continual war is the expression of class conflict in capitalist society. It goes on in spite of the fact that some labor leaders say, with Walter Reuther, that “we don’t believe in the class struggle.”

The war between capital and labor changes with the changing times. It took American workers a century and a half of militant battling before they succeeded in having written into law their right to organize into unions and to bargain collectively without interference from the employers. The passage of the Wagner Act in 1935 coincided with the appearance on the trade union scene of the CIO with its emphasis on industrial unionism in place of the traditional craft union policy of the AFL. In the wave of organization that followed, trade union membership skyrocketed; within four years the CIO had enrolled four million members—as much as the AFL had organized in its entire history—and the AFL’s membership also soared. During the period from 1935 to 1945, trade union membership quadrupled; in the next ten-year period from 1945 to 1955, membership increased only about 25 percent. Membership in United States unions in 1956 totaled approximately 18.5 million, which, deducting the more than a million of these members living outside continental United States (primarily in Canada), equaled about 25 percent of the labor force.

Membership in American unions continues, as it has for a long time, to be heavily concentrated in a few large organizations. Thus,

of 189 national and international unions, the six at the top in 1956—teamsters, auto, steel, machinists, carpenters, and electrical workers (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers)—had more than a third of all organized workers. A survey conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that the combined membership of these six biggest unions was more than two and a half times as great as the total white-collar membership. The number of white-collar workers organized into unions is 2.5 million, or less than 15 percent of total union membership.

The open bloody warfare that accompanied the spectacular growth of unions in the 1930s is much less prevalent today—except in the South. But that employers still resort to violence to “keep the union out” is shown in the opening paragraphs of a story which appeared in the *New York Times* on September 8, 1953—two months before Fairless of U.S. Steel was orating on the “identity of interests” of labor and capital, and exactly one day after Dave Beck called the perpetual labor-employer conflict an “old-fashioned” notion:

*Hyden, Ky., Sept. 7*—In the capital of the non-union coal producing country here, John L. Lewis' United Mine Workers Union has been waging a campaign for more than two years to bring the operators under contract.

Eight organizers have been shot, one of them died, another is completely paralyzed. Cars have been dynamited and union meeting places, members' homes and friendly merchants' stores have been blasted or fired upon. The union and its local leaders have been sued, indicted, enjoined and even jailed.

This kind of violence, so typical of the labor-capital war in the 1930s, seldom makes the headlines today. The Kohler Company war on the UAW, now in its fourth year, has been fought on the old lines with gun emplacements, barricades, machine guns, strikebreakers, and mass firings, but this is no longer the common pattern. Some of the most viciously anti-union employers of the old days fought the Kohler way, lost the battle, and now have collective bargaining contracts with powerful unions. Making a virtue out of necessity, they refer to union representation as “an accepted part of our industrial system” (Fairless, *op. cit.*).

This imprimatur coming from the big industrialists who have no



choice now that they are faced with mighty union organizations which grew out of the bloody conflicts of the past; plus the fact that apart from exceptions like those in Kentucky and Kohler noted above (and in the South), the riot gun, tear gas, armed guards type of battling is not nearly so common as it once was; plus the legal restraints imposed on anti-unionism by the Wagner Act and other legislation—these changes have created the general impression that management accepts unionization, that employers no longer make war on labor organization. This has become the underlying premise of writers in the field of labor management relations. Thus, Professor Clark Kerr, noted labor economist and Chancellor of the University of California at Berkeley, wrote the following in *Unions and Union Leaders of Their Own Choosing*, a pamphlet published in 1958 by the Fund For The Republic:

The day of fighting the unions is largely past, at least under conditions of full employment. The separation of interests between the leaders of the two organizations [i.e., the companies and the unions] is decaying because industrial peace pays. Consequently, company pressure on most unions has been greatly reduced and in some instances has entirely disappeared.

What Professor Kerr writes may be true of those industries where unions already exist, but it is definitely not true in the unorganized sector. The evidence that many employers are still unreconciled to unions, that they do everything they can to block the efforts of their employees to organize, and that, if they fail, they then make “sweet-heart” agreements with “cooperating” unions, is conclusive. It comes from the Select Committee on Improper Activities in the Labor or Management Field of the United States Senate—the McClellan Committee.

The McClellan Committee devoted most of its attention to an investigation of union racketeers and union racketeering. It conducted only two months of hearings on employer anti-unionism. It did not probe nearly so deeply into this subject as did the La Follette Civil Liberties Committee in the 1930s. But it uncovered enough to show that big and little firms today, like big and little firms yesterday, still carry on the anti-union war—with the techniques tailor-made to fit the changed legal situation.

The McClellan Committee turned its spotlight on the activities of Nathan W. Shefferman and his firm, Labor Relations Associates of Chicago, representing some 400 clients throughout the United States. One of hundreds of similar "labor relations" outfits, LRA earned a gross income of \$2,481,798.88 for the seven-year period from January 1949 through December 1955. Among its clients were these familiar names: Victor Adding Machine Company, Chicago; All-State Insurance Company; Blue Cross, Jacksonville, Florida; the Mennen Company; S. S. Kresge Company, Detroit; United Parcel Service, Chicago; Nieman-Marcus Company, Houston; Schaefer Brewing Company, Brooklyn; Abraham & Strauss, Brooklyn; and in New York, American Express, the Lerner Shops, Altman's, Bloomingdale's, and Macy's.

Shefferman was set up in business in 1939 "with the aid, advice, and financial assistance of Sears, Roebuck & Co." (*Interim Report* of the McClellan Committee, p. 274.) For union-busting activities, companies are willing to spend lavishly. Before the La Follette Committee, General Motors officials testified that they had paid out to all the labor spy agencies they had hired in the period from January 1934 to July 1936, the sum of \$994,855.68. McClellan Committee investigators found that in the years 1953 through 1956, Sears, Roebuck had paid to Shefferman and his union-busting agency a total of \$239,651.42. Sears was so pleased with Shefferman's anti-union work that it recommended his agency to its suppliers, gave him discounts to win the favor of his clients, and paid "entertainment expenses" for some of them.

Why? What did Sears get in return for the nearly a quarter of a million dollars which it paid to LRA? It got what it wanted—defeat of the AFL Retail Clerks Union drive in its Boston store. When the Shefferman agency operatives had finished their "work," the majority of the Sears employees voted for no union. It wanted to keep other stores from being organized—LRA worked on that, too. It wanted unions kept out of the plants of its suppliers such as the Whirlpool Corporation which manufactures Sears' "Kenmore" refrigerators, ranges, and washing machines—the McClellan Committee gives the details of LRA's union-busting program at the Whirlpool plant, and says in its *Interim Report* (p. 267): "The evidence showed that next to Sears, Roebuck & Co., the largest single pay-

ments of retainers were made to Shefferman's firm by the Whirlpool Corporation for work done in connection with its plants at Marion and Clyde, Ohio, and St. Joseph, Michigan." Sears didn't want its workers organized—LRA's success is shown in the fact that only 14,000 of its 205,000 workers have joined a union, and half of the 14,000 are in the Teamsters Union. Dave Beck and Shefferman were bosom pals—trips, entertainment, and presents for Beck were paid for by Shefferman with Sears money; this may help to explain why the Teamsters have never really gone after organizing Sears.

The evidence is plain—Sears got its money's worth from LRA. But "two top officials of Sears, Roebuck & Co. testified that they were shocked at the techniques used by the Shefferman firm in the Boston case." (*Interim Report*, p. 282.) Julius Rosenwald, the founder of the firm, probably would not have apologized to the McClellan Committee because, unlike the current crop of Sears officials, he was frank to admit that his relations with labor were guided by whether or not there was money in it. He was quite candid about his role as an employer. In *Men Who Are Making America* (New York, 1926, p. 316), B. C. Forbes quotes Julius Rosenwald:

Don't imagine, however, that anything we do for our people in the way of profit sharing, or enabling them to acquire stock, or providing meals at low rates, medical attention, recreation grounds, vacations, and so forth is done from philanthropic motives—not in the least. Whatever we do for our employers we do because we think it pays, because it is good business.

Shefferman's agency employed 35 operatives who were assigned to whatever client anywhere in the country was having "union trouble." The techniques they used to smash the union or bring in a cooperating union with a "sweetheart" contract varied according to the particular setup, but the general pattern was the same. It was well illustrated to the McClellan Committee in the story of the Morton Frozen Food Company which opened a plant for the making of frozen meat pies, fruit pies, and TV dinners at Webster City, Iowa, in February 1955.

After the plant had been in operation four months, field representative Eugene Peterson of the United Packinghouse Workers, CIO, started a drive to organize the 200 women and 100 men em-

ployees. The Morton Company hired LRA to keep the union out. John Nevett, agency operative, soon turned up in Webster City, and the anti-union campaign took shape: (1) Two pro-company men were sent to a local attorney who helped them organize a "We, the Morton Workers" committee which promptly prepared and distributed anti-CIO leaflets. (2) The anti-union committee was enlarged and, with Nevett, checked off on a list those employees who were pro-union and those who were anti-union. (3) Some of the pro-union employees were fired, some were transferred to inferior jobs. Gary Long, Morton Worker who was first contacted by operative Nevett and was the organizer of the "We, the Morton Workers" committee, gave this sworn testimony to the Senate Committee:

MR. LONG. Well, we picked 3 or 4 more of our friends and brought them up to the office [of the local attorney] one night, and we prepared this antiunion or these antiunion leaflets and passed them out in front of the plant after work. . . .

MR. KENNEDY. You would meet with Mr. Nevett in Mr. Binn's office [plant manager] and check over the employees as to whether they were prounion or antiunion?

MR. LONG. That is right. . . .

MR. KENNEDY. Did Mr. Binns tell you or did he say anything to you about what action would be taken against people who were favoring the union?

MR. LONG. Yes, sir.

MR. KENNEDY. Tell us what he said to you.

MR. LONG. He made the comment that "there are two that won't be with us much longer."

MR. KENNEDY. They were people in favor of the union?

MR. LONG. Right.

MR. KENNEDY. Were they there much longer?

MR. LONG. No.

*(Hearings Before the Select Committee on Improper Activities in the Labor or Management Field, Part 15, p. 5781.)*

Nevett worked intermittently for about five months; his "We, the Morton Workers" committee continued to put out its anti-union leaflets; for new applicants for jobs a "family information form" was prepared by Nevett and gone over by the attorney for the plant who noted "o.k." or "no" on them. When the NLRB election was held on November 22, 1955, the result was: for the Packinghouse Workers Union 103, against the union 196, challenged 14.

For its work in keeping the union out of the plant, LRA was paid by the Morton Company the sum of \$12,590.29. The Morton Company had also to give a substantial raise in pay to Long for his participation on the "spontaneous" committee, plus overtime payments which other employees did not get. But the Morton Company did well on the deal—in other food plants which had been organized by the Packinghouse Workers and had a union contract, average wages for women workers were 26 cents per hour higher and for men 48 cents per hour higher. So by hiring LRA to keep the union out, Morton had saved roughly \$170,000. (*Interim Report*, p. 259.)

In the ordinary course of events that would be the end of this anti-union story. But shortly after the election, the Morton Frozen Food Company became a division of the Continental Baking Company of New York. And whereas Morton wanted no union in the plant, Continental did want a union—its own pet, the Bakery and Confectionery Workers' International Union. What the workers at the plant wanted didn't seem to matter—Continental wanted to sign up with the Bakery union.

The Bakers, at the invitation of Continental, put on an organizing drive, but unfortunately for management, the workers had learned their *no-union* lesson from LRA too well, and the Bakers drive didn't get off the ground. What to do? Call Shefferman. Done. Enter Charles Bromley, LRA operative sent in to generate union interest on the part of the workers for the Bakers union.

Phyllis Ring, secretary to plant manager Binns when all this was going on, gave this testimony to the McClellan Committee:

SENATOR ERVIN. As I understand it, Mr. Nevett, representing the Shefferman interests, came down to teach that unions were bad?

MRS. RING. Yes.

SENATOR ERVIN. And then Mr. Bromley, representing the Shefferman interests, came down to teach that the unions were good?

MRS. RING. Yes.

SENATOR ERVIN. And you say Mr. Bromley had some difficulty because Mr. Nevett had been such a good teacher?

MRS. RING. That is right.

(*Hearings*, Part 15, p. 5799.)

Bromley went about the job of "re-educating" the Morton workers, securing signatures on Bakery union cards; meanwhile, in the office of Shefferman in Chicago, without the knowledge of the Bakers union representative in Webster City, the higher-ups of Continental and the union signed an agreement which the Senate Committee reports was "arrived at without the formality of an NLRB election and . . . the negotiations were conducted without the participation or even the knowledge of the workers who were to be affected by this contract." (*Interim Report*, p. 263.)

The Bakers union representative, Merle Smith, testified that when he finally saw a copy of the contract, his reaction was one of "disgust, disappointment, and just—I was almost ready to blow my top." (*Hearings*, Part 15, p. 5880.) It was a "sweetheart" all right, since it "provided no seniority protection to the employees, allowed the company to do away with a wage incentive program without consulting the union, and provided only a 5-cent wage increase." (*Interim Report*, pp. 265, 266.) It was such a let-down, Smith testified, from what the workers had been promised when they were asked to sign the cards for the Bakers union, that he "did not have the courage to read the entire thing to the membership, so when they finally approved it they did not know its full content." (*Interim Report*, p. 263.)

It becomes obvious, from the findings of the Senate Committee, that Labor Relations Associates was not selling what its name suggests. On the contrary, it was selling *no* labor relations. That's what the employers wanted, that's what they were paying for. Senator McClellan, chairman of the committee, said so in a statement issued on November 5, 1957:

The activities disclosed before this committee reflect a great discredit on some business firms in this country. They cannot adopt the posture, as did some of the firms appearing here, that all this was the doing of Mr. Shefferman and his agents. . . . It was management who paid the bills for the activities of Nathan Shefferman, and it was management which knowingly utilized the services of Nathan Shefferman with no compunctions or regrets until the revelations in recent months. They were aware of what they were doing and how their money was being utilized. (*New York Times*, November 6, 1957.)

It must not be supposed that the old reliables in "labor relations," the old spy agencies like Burns and Pinkerton whose activities in union-smashing were revealed by the La Follette Committee, have left the field to Shefferman. Not at all. In a front-page story on December 1, 1953, the *Wall Street Journal* tells us: "The private detective, hero of many a mystery story and TV thriller, is doing more and more of his sleuthing on behalf of business these days. . . . All told, it's estimated that there are over 5000 private detective agencies in the country, taking in more than \$150 million a year. . . ."

Undoubtedly many of these agencies are investigating in fields completely unrelated to labor relations—pilferage in plants, credit risks, fraud, and—such are the ethics of capitalist society—the customers and secrets of their clients' business competitors. But business firms hire these agencies for still another reason, according to Mr. John O. Camden, vice-president of the Pinkerton agency: "There's a growing concern in business about Communist infiltration into plants and offices." (*Wall Street Journal*, December 1, 1953.)

This explanation sounds plausible in a period of cold war when the hunt for so-called "security risks" has become a national obsession. But it is not so convincing when we recall that the predecessors of Mr. Camden, on the stand before the La Follette Committee, also talked about ferreting out sabotage, theft, Communists, when they were really spying out members of unions. Here are the Pinkerton officials on the stand:

SENATOR LA FOLLETTE. Mr. Pinkerton, will you take a look at that exhibit, please [Pinkerton journal sheet], and tell me what kind of information you would say the agency would try to get for the United States Rubber Reclaiming Company?

MR. PINKERTON. Information dealing with sabotage, theft of material and other irregularities. . . .

[SENATOR LA FOLLETTE then reads a report of a Pinkerton spy, dated May 16, 1936, *describing a union meeting* attended by some workers of the United States Rubber Reclaiming Company, Buffalo, N. Y.]

SENATOR LA FOLLETTE. Would you say that this report had to do with investigation of sabotage of the company's property, theft or other irregularities?

MR. PINKERTON. No, sir.

SENATOR LA FOLLETTE. What would you say, Mr. Rossetter, about that?

MR. ROSSETTER [vice-president and general manager]. I would say that it did not touch those points, but my impression is that that was a "Red" organization. I am not familiar with the names of the different units comprising the Communist Party or its supporters, but that report would cover—

SENATOR LA FOLLETTE (interrupting). Would you say it had anything to do with the investigation of the company's property, theft of materials, or other irregularities?

MR. ROSSETTER. It might lead to sabotage if those people were the kind that I think they may be—Communists.

SENATOR LA FOLLETTE. Now, Mr. Rossetter, isn't it true that the description, in the Pinkerton journal, of sabotage, theft and irregularity often actually covers up investigations to be made of union activities?

MR. ROSSETTER. Well, if you can take that as a sample, I will have to say "yes" to it. . . .

(Quoted in Leo Huberman, *The Labor Spy Racket*, New York, 1937, pp. 14, 15. Emphasis added.)

Today, the prevailing practice is to hire ex-FBI men to ferret out "security risks." One of them, agent Albert J. Tuohy, Security Director for Republic Aviation, gleefully described his tactics in an article in the magazine *Factory Management & Maintenance* in October 1954. The article was entitled "What You Can Do About Communists In Industry." Here is Mr. Tuohy's answer—note how quickly the jump is made from "Communists" to active unionists:

Fire 'em! . . . That's exactly what we did to 250 of them this year. . . . Of those 250, only 15 were known Communists. No matter. They all get the same treatment. . . .

We're alert to which men are becoming prominent in plant organizations ranging from hobby and sport to religious and political groups. We know who is running for office and who has been elected in the various organizations.

Techniques of spying out unionists have, of course, changed with the times. This is the age of electronics and the newest methods include hidden television cameras and wire-tapping. This became front-page news in New York City in December 1957, when the Motormen's Benevolent Association went on strike for eight days. When the details of secret conversations in union headquarters became known to Transit Authority officials, Frank Zelano, executive secretary of the union, wondered how it happened. He searched the



meeting room and found a small microphone embedded in a sponge which was fastened to the underside of a radiator. Wires attached to the microphone led to a recording room in an office building. Further investigation disclosed that ever since the union had been formed, in 1955, its headquarters and meeting halls had been "bugged" by the Transit Authority.

Most expert, perhaps, of the professional wiretappers and eavesdroppers is a man named Bernard Spindel. In testimony before a Congressional committee in March 1955, he amazed his listeners by claiming that he could stand outside the building he was in and listen to telephone conversations inside; make a record of private conversations with a device 500 yards away from the talkers; stand several feet from a row of public phone booths and record, without tap wires, both sides of a conversation on any of the phones. (*New York Times*, March 31, 1955.)

Obviously so highly skilled a specialist would not long go unnoticed by business. In an illuminating article entitled "The Private Eyes" in the *Reporter* for February 10, 1955, we learn that Spindel has indeed found all kinds of employment for his specialty. Here is a description of part of one operation conducted for the manager of an eastern aircraft factory:

To maintain a constant watch over the activities of plant employees, Spindel has installed no less than twelve bugs—four in the men's washroom, two in the women's washroom, and six in the company dining hall. . . .

"That's one factory where nobody pulls wool over the boss's eyes," Spindel boasts. "The manager has found the setup very useful. He knows just which employees are acting up on the outside. He knows which junior executives are loyal to him and which are his enemies, and that way he knows who to promote and who to fire."

It's loyalty to the *country* which is, supposedly, in question in the case of security risks; but the loyalty which determines who gets promoted or fired in this aviation factory, is loyalty "to him"—the boss. And active unionists, or any one left of Senator Eastland, are always looked upon as disloyal.

Beneath the sugar-coating of sweet phrases concerning the partnership of capital and labor, there lies the bitter pill of class war.

So long as society is divided into classes with opposing interests, the class war must exist. There is no use in imagining that it is merely the invention of agitators—and that if only people would stop believing in it, it would vanish. That is as ridiculous as saying that those scientists who discovered the atom, invented it, and if only people would stop believing in it, it would cease to exist.

The class struggle can no more be willed *into* being by those who accept it as a fact of capitalist life than it can be willed out of being by those who reject it.

Far from being advocates of class war, those of us who are socialists are unalterably opposed to it. We believe in the brotherhood of man, in the Golden Rule—instead of the rule of gold. That's why we are in favor of the transition from a society in which classes *must* exist, capitalism, to a society in which classes will not exist, socialism.

# LABOR AND POLITICS

BY HARRY BRAVERMAN

The United States has reached a stage in its historical development where the objectives of its labor movement are in fact unattainable without the formation of a political party directly concerned with their promotion.

Harold J. Laski,  
*The American Democracy*

**B**ACK in the 1920s, the most baffling and vexatious feature of the American scene, in the eyes of thoughtful radicals and liberals, was the powerlessness and inactivity of labor on the political front. In Europe, the long evolution of the labor movements had created powerful socialist parties. By contrast, American labor efforts were not only feeble, but seemed to be getting weaker. The local labor parties that had sprung up early in the nineteenth century lasted only a few years before succumbing to inexperience and factional conflict between nostrum peddlers. After the Civil War, a few semi-national organizations tried to blend trade-union and political functions, but their strength was limited by the weakness and decline of the organized base upon which they rested, and much of the labor politics of the day fell into confused efforts at making alliances with Greenbackism, the Single Tax movement, and Populism, with few satisfactory results. With the rise of the AFL, political non-partisanship and disentanglement became the watchwords. Independent labor politics went over largely into radical politics, had its heyday in the Debs

era, and thereafter faded into a game played by isolated sects with practically no impact on the electorate.

The post-World War I days witnessed a significant interlude. The Non-Partisan League of North Dakota, which had taken over the administration of that state in a whirlwind farm revolt, spread to a number of other states in the Northwest, and began to involve labor in the cities of the area. As far east as Illinois, John Fitzpatrick, head of the Chicago Federation of Labor, organized the Farmer-Labor Party of Illinois, and the 1920 elections saw a number of such parties on the ballot. At the same time, the railroad unions were wrestling with the problem of how to maintain their wartime gains, made under government administration of the industry. They pushed the Plumb Plan for cooperative management of the roads, but both parties got together and, in turning the railroads back to private ownership, handed the workers a Railway Labor Board which started pressing for wage cuts and the obliteration of valuable shop rules. The result was the Conference for Progressive Political Action, formed in 1921 by the four railroad Brotherhoods outside the AFL, the 12 Brotherhoods inside, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, and the Socialist Party.

When, in 1924, the Republicans nominated Coolidge and the Democrats chose John W. Davis, a corporation lawyer closely identified with the Morgan interests, the CPPA joined with the Northwest farmer-labor groups and the Wisconsin progressive Republicans in a third-party venture. The AFL, rudely rebuffed by both old parties, gave only grudging support to the enterprise; but many unions, city and state labor bodies, cooperatives, and other such organizations dove into the 1924 presidential campaign with a will. The Progressive Independents polled almost five million votes for La Follette, some 16.5 percent of the total. While this gave the La Follette ticket the electoral vote of only one state, Wisconsin, it came in ahead of the Democrats as the "second party" in a dozen others.

In retrospect, the showing had all the marks of a good beginning, but it led to nothing further at the time. The Wisconsin insurgents went back to the Republican Party after the death of La Follette, group after group broke away, the railroad Brotherhoods lapsed once more into political immobility after getting partial satisfaction of their grievances, and the CPPA was soon destroyed. Ob-

servers were quick to label the movement the "last gasp" of anti-monopoly farm revolt, which perhaps it was. In the euphoria of the twenties, commentators and analysts were most impressed by the rapid disintegration of the protest movement. Few took note of the rapidity with which it had been assembled, or, more significant, of the role which labor had played for the first time in a national political movement.

Meanwhile, the traditionally "political" unions were becoming more and more indistinguishable from the typical AFL business agents' paradise. In the needle trades unions, for example, socialist influence had always been heavy. The Amalgamated Clothing Workers had been formed as a semi-industrial union outside of the AFL, before World War I, and foreshadowed the later CIO in its basic principles and origin. The Amalgamated membership was strongly socialist in ideology, as were some of the leaders, and the special distinction of the union was its "social" flavoring. Yet, by the late twenties, such unions as the Amalgamated and the United Mine Workers—which could boast before the war of conventions at which one-third of the delegates held Socialist Party cards—were not practicing too different a unionism from much of the AFL. While left-wingers placed a lot of the blame on this or that personality, the universality of the development showed that it was not a matter especially of "misleadership"—although there was plenty of that—but of a strong tropism in the American environment which bent all the unions in this conservative, business-unionist direction as a condition of their existence.

The progress-in-reverse of the American labor movement was soon codified in a number of theories. Selig Perlman relates, in the preface to his book *A Theory of the Labor Movement* (New York, 1928) how as a young man in Russia in the first years of the century, he had "professed the theory of the labor movement found in the Marxian classics." But after coming to this country and joining the research staff of Professor John R. Commons at the University of Wisconsin, he underwent a sharp change in outlook. The Marxists had always depicted an "ascent" from "pure and simple trade unionism" to a labor and socialist political consciousness. Yet, he found, the American Federation of Labor, growing out of the socialist movements among immigrant workers in the sixties and seventies, had shucked off its early political mentality. Such AFL founders as

Gompers, Strasser, and McGuire had all started as socialists and had been led by their experiences to a pure-and-simple union path. Thus, Perlman theorized, the notion that labor has a "historical mission," a political task, to perform, proved under classic conditions to be alien, grafted on by intellectuals, and soon outgrown in favor of the "maturity" of business unionism devoid of ultimate ends.

At the time, such theories had great empirical appeal. The labor movement seemed to be inexorably impelled to "find itself" in Gompersism. Looking back today from the vantage point of three more decades of experience, however, it becomes clear that Gompers reflected a brief stage, rather than the end product of labor evolution. Shortly after Professor Perlman completed his theory, it was rudely exploded by the Great Depression, the rapid mass organization of the industrial workers, and the creation of a great new labor movement, five times as large as that of the twenties. Moreover, this new labor movement was galvanized by two great waves of political activity which, although they have not created the labor party of long radical aspiration, have completely altered the politics of the nation and labor's place in them.

The first wave coincided with the industrial union movement. In 1933, even before the formation of the CIO, labor and farmer-labor political formations began to crop up—in Connecticut, New Jersey, Washington, Massachusetts, Ohio, and elsewhere. Several powerful AFL unions leagued together in a bloc committed to independent political action, and got support from many city central bodies and state federations. At the 1935 convention of the AFL, 13 resolutions calling for the formation of an independent labor or farmer-labor party were introduced by unions representing about a half-million members. In 1936, the convention of the reorganized auto workers' union passed a resolution in favor of a farmer-labor party. The Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party, the sole major remnant of the old Non-Partisan League movement and the 1924 La Follette campaign, enjoyed a great surge of support and by 1930 had elected a Farmer-Labor governor. In March 1936, that party, in an action attracting widespread notice at the time, came out for the exploration of possibilities of a new nationwide party similar to itself.

In the summer of 1936, the CIO leaders, with the cooperation of some of the AFL unions, set up Labor's Non-Partisan League,

which played an active role in the Roosevelt landslide of that year. The CIO made a major foray into the Democratic Party of Pennsylvania, and, while failing to capture it, succeeded in installing Thomas Kennedy, secretary-treasurer of the miners' union, as lieutenant-governor of the state, and in winning the administrations of a number of small steel and coal cities. The American Labor Party was organized in New York State to give the hundreds of thousands of socialist-minded voters a chance to get behind Roosevelt without having to vote Democratic. The new party polled some 300,000 votes in its first year, and increased that total substantially in later years, electing five out of 26 New York City councilmen in 1937, and remaining a power until about 1950. Thus by the time the CIO was organizationally consolidated, labor had become a powerful force in the nation's politics, speaking with a new voice of authority on national and international, as well as purely "labor," issues. In a scant ten years from the time when Perlman's theory of progressive retrogression from politics to pure unionism had been announced, the entire picture had been turned on its head, or, more properly, right side up. Labor's evolution had once again assumed a forward direction.

The second major wave of labor politics came toward the end of, and after, World War II. Labor's Non-Partisan League had collapsed in the break between John L. Lewis and the rest of the CIO over support of Roosevelt, and in the early war years the unions concentrated their efforts on further organization of the war-swollen industries and extension of economic gains. But after a few years of war, the labor ranks began to chafe under the restrictions that held them to a specious "equality of sacrifice" while corporate enrichment soared as never before. A number of strikes, particularly in the coal mines, caused the Roosevelt administration to raise the issue of compulsory drafting of workers, or "national service" legislation, and relations between Roosevelt and the unions began to show signs of strain.

The May 1943 convention of the Michigan CIO witnessed a significant blowup, as a group of second-line leaders rose in revolt, passing resolutions against the no-strike pledge and for an independent labor party. The October 1943 convention of the auto union voted only "conditional support" to Roosevelt for a fourth term. In early 1944, the insurgent UAW forces started a new party, the Michigan

Commonwealth Federation, which, after a promising beginning, was pressured into the newly formed Political Action Committee setup.

The Political Action Committee of the CIO was started in 1943; and, with its formation, the now-familiar pattern of labor politics began to take shape. It was reinforced later by the AFL's Labor League for Political Education, and the merger of the two union federations eventually produced the present Committee on Political Education, through which the labor movement now exerts its by no means negligible influence on American politics.

Despite all this, the labor movement has produced neither its own party nor a truly independent political organization. In retrospect, the job is not as easy as it may have seemed at various times. That the early movements foundered and the AFL alone possessed the sea legs with which to weather the vicissitudes of labor organization, seems to us today not the conniving of traitorous men that it seemed to the radicals of the time, but the pressure of material forces stronger than any ideology. The 1924 coalition behind La Follette was clearly an initial foray with only ephemeral possibilities, since, as Sidney Hillman was later to point out, the United States never really possessed a labor movement worthy of that name until the formation of the CIO. The narrow craft organizations of that day were too weak a base for a political movement. The wartime and postwar upsurges, while they looked promising at the time, were impelled by mass sentiments that soon evaporated. Wartime grievances were resolved with the close of the war and the strike wave of 1946, and the widespread fears among workers that the end of the war would bring a renewal of the depression of the thirties proved premature.

Yet, coldly and realistically as we may appraise the past, there was clearly one opportunity for revamping American politics along labor lines—that was in the formative years of the CIO. The late thirties saw many of the ingredients for a new alignment present in abundant proportions. Faith in the capitalist system had been severely shaken among wide masses of people. Great and powerful new organizations of labor had just come into being, and were advancing rapidly. Among the farmers and middle class, political ferments were, if anything, even greater. Sizable and energetic forces of organizers, chiefly young radicals, had won their spurs in the industrial battles of the day and were looking towards broader social horizons. Labor's



prestige in the nation was high, and it was widely viewed as a crusade which could lead the nation out of the wilderness of unemployment, greed, and strife. Yet, no basic realignment appeared.

The alliance with Roosevelt and the liberal New Dealers was probably an inevitable feature of the rise of the unions in the thirties. In more ways than one, Roosevelt was the real political leader of the CIO in those days. The new atmosphere that had materialized in Washington, and the new attitudes coming out of it, seemed to the workers part and parcel of their own strivings for unionization. Yet it did not take a master strategist to see that the objectives of the Democratic Party, with its reactionary Southern wing, were not identical with the objectives of the labor movement. Congress was a great disappointment after 1938, when it stopped passing liberal legislation; the corrupt city machines upon which the Democratic Party rested in the North had their own ends in view; and Roosevelt, even with his liberal experimentalism, was always balancing between antagonistic forces.

In that situation, it didn't take radical ideology—just common sense—to see that the sooner labor built its own truly independent political power and vehicles, the better position it would be in to secure its gains and continue its advance. And that is just what its actions were commonly interpreted as meaning. No one expected a sudden rupture with Roosevelt, but many expected the construction of local labor parties and the running of local labor slates, the building of an independent political organization, and the gradual preparation for the eventual launching of a labor party. When Labor's Non-Partisan League was begun, when many local campaigns did eventuate, when the American Labor Party was founded, when John L. Lewis began to cross swords with Roosevelt over the Little Steel strike—Lewis accusing the President of ingratitude after having "supped at labor's table"—an evolution in the direction of a labor party seemed inevitable.

But the pattern was disrupted by the timidity of narrow-minded leaders. Most of the CIO succumbed to Democratic blandishments. Lewis, for his part, trying to carry his course through to some kind of an end, was rapidly isolated, and, striking out in a blind and vain rage, jumped over to the Republicans in the election of 1940. The fault was not that a labor party was not launched, full blown, to op-

pose Roosevelt in 1940. That was not in the cards nor would it necessarily have been wise. The fault was that the continuity of political evolution was forcibly broken, labor's political independence sacrificed, and the process which would have eventually led to the creation of a new party totally disrupted by short-sighted leaders. The coming of war completed the havoc, drowning labor in a sea of spurious "national unity" shouting in which the New Deal was knifed to death and the labor political organizations nearly wiped out.

If there is no labor party, and no noticeable trend to one at the moment, what then is there in the way of labor political organization? Harold Laski, in his *American Democracy*, (New York, 1948) passed a rather harsh judgment:

The CIO has therefore continued to employ the technique of Gompers; the only difference is the vigor and urgency with which they have used it. . . .

The only difference in principle between the outlook of Mr. Gompers, say, in 1913, and Mr. Hillman in 1944, was that the latter had evolved for the CIO a much more effective organ for political expression in the PAC than anything Mr. Gompers had constructed in his long years of almost unrivalled leadership. (pp. 221, 226.)

From the purely formal point of view, there is evidence to back up this opinion. After all, the techniques of lobbying and labor pressure were not unknown to the AFL years ago, and non-partisanship was more often a pose than a fact. The AFL broke its posture a number of times to participate actively in political campaigns. The 1906 political program of the AFL embraced an ambitious list of objectives and promised electoral efforts to secure acceptable nominees and even to make independent nominations where neither party chose an acceptable candidate. In the first Wilson administration, the high point of AFL legislative efforts, the passage of the Clayton bill and an eight-hour railroad bill, moved a great New York newspaper to protest that "Congress is a subordinate branch of the American Federation of Labor." If the current labor movement is trying merely to secure certain legislation, and to "punish friends and reward enemies" at election time, what then has been the advance?

This is one of those cases where purely formal criteria fail. The fact is that there has been a great transformation in labor's political

role, though it is not possible to analyze it by a comparison restricted to the resolutions of Gompers' day and ours. In the first place, there has been a big change in the thinking of millions of workers, so that they now vote as a fairly solid and cohesive bloc—not unanimously, but in sufficient numbers to show a rudimentary consciousness of common class interest. Joel Seidman wrote in the *Public Opinion Quarterly* in October 1939, when talk of a labor party was on many lips, that "a workers' political party is not likely to become a permanent and major factor in the United States until the great bulk of American wage-earners recognize that they belong to a working class, and that they and their children are likely to remain there permanently." This important postulate thus stated, he then proceeded to blinker his vision by following the Gallup pollsters' lead into a never-never land where all America considered itself "middle class." The Gallup poll had asked a sampling of Americans, in the style of the W. Lloyd Warner school of sociologists, whether they consider themselves "upper class," "middle class," or "lower class." Naturally, just about everyone (88 percent) said "middle class," and Seidman dolefully concluded that there was nothing to be done along laborite lines in politics.

Professor Richard Centers some years later noticed something wrong with this procedure, and made a reputation for himself by simply adding to the questions the additional choice of "working class." Lo and behold! A goodly half of his respondents, the largest single category, leaped voluntarily into that class. He then went further, and constructed a battery of six questions, touching on strikes, unions, government ownership of industry, and the like, as a test of "conservatism" and "radicalism." Not only did he find that a good third or more of the sampled group fell into the radical side of his balance, but that the feelings of radicalism were concentrated most heavily among the working class sections. (See Joseph A. Kahl, *The American Class Structure*, New York, 1957, Chapter 6.)

Since these studies, various analyses of national election returns have strongly confirmed a tentative division in the population along ideological lines, with the Democratic Party winning the bulk of the protest, or laborite, or liberal, or welfare-statist—however you chose to label it—vote. The excellent study of the Wayne County (Michigan) voting of auto union members in the 1952 election, *When Labor*

*Votes* (Arthur W. Kornhauser and others, New York, 1956), gave one of the clearest pictures. The investigators found that when they constructed a scale of occupations ranging from white collar through skilled and semi-skilled workers, the voting for Stevenson followed the scale with mathematical purity, ranging from 41 percent in the case of white collar workers up to 81 percent for semi-skilled workers earning less than \$2 an hour. When they divided their interviewees into groups who owned their own homes and those who didn't, they found that 85 percent of renters voted Democratic as against 71 percent of owners. No matter what kind of an economic or occupational scale they constructed, they got the same kind of correlation, even when they went by fathers' occupations! The studies of Samuel Lubell and others, or even common rough observations of voting by ward and precinct in important elections, all have proven that, if we haven't got a class and social division in politics today, we have something that closely resembles it.

Of course, no figures can prove that America is today divided along lines of class feeling comparable to those on the European continent. The Eisenhower trend that chipped away at the pattern described above in 1952 and 1956 is one piece of contrary evidence. The fact that one of the old parties, differing very little in ideology from its twin, is the repository of this laborite feeling is another. The absence of a coherent body of labor feeling on many issues of national and international scope that go beyond the quarrels in which the unions are directly interested, is a third. The weakness of socialism and all forms of radicalism is still another. But few can claim today, as was commonly agreed years ago, that there is neither a labor ideology nor a labor voting coherence. In rudimentary form, both of these exist sufficiently to sustain a body of labor political activity far beyond what is at present undertaken by the union movement.

This trend to a labor vote is the first basic change from the days of Gompers. The second is the development of a major alliance between labor and one wing of the Democratic Party, to the point where this has now become one of the foundation stones of American politics. This new feature has become prominent in the national headlines, especially since the 1944 Democratic Convention where the phrase imputed to Roosevelt about the choice of a Vice-Presidential nominee—"Clear it with Sidney [Hillman]"—was put to use as a Re-

publican campaign slogan. But while the *national* power of labor has often been exaggerated, the clearest evidences of this new alignment and the most significant portents for the future are to be found on the local level.

With the rise of the unions came the erosion of the powers of the city political bosses. The mass industrial organizations were able to perform on a wholesale basis the welfare functions previously retailed by the ward and county boss. The new pole of allegiance rallied the most energetic and forward-looking of the workers, liberals, young lawyers, and those who previously clustered around party clubs. Even in voting power, while the unions quickly found that they could not turn over unanimous blocs of votes with a word of command, they were able to swing sizable parts of the electorate that rivaled those controlled by precinct machines which had been a century in the building. The factors of union endorsement, union financial contributions, union-paid political workers in the weeks before election day, began to loom large on the political horizon and brought the shrewder politicians around to negotiations. Thus the unions took their place side by side with the party machines in many cities as factors to be reckoned with.

The most telling single example, of course, is that of Michigan. Normally a Republican state, the permanent Democratic organization was weak, and, after a brief joyride during the New Deal, collapsed entirely in 1942, leaving control in the hands of a clique of Old Guard Democrats with their eyes on Washington patronage. Two dissatisfied groups developed, the "Reform Democrats," and the "Michigan Democratic Club" of New Dealers. The labor movement entered the picture strongly after 1944 with a state Political Action Committee, and, after pressuring the Michigan Commonwealth Federation back into line, started looking around for footholds in the Democratic Party. A coalition with the two dissident groups was formed in the early part of 1947. The state PAC formulated the following course: "It is our objective in adopting this policy to remold the Democratic Party into a real liberal and progressive political party which can be subscribed to by members of the CIO and other liberals. We therefore advise CIO members to become active precinct, ward, county, and congressional district workers and attempt to become delegates to Democratic conventions."

In the 1950 convention of the Democratic Party, this coalition, composed of the two Democratic factions, the CIO, parts of the AFL, and some minority groups, was able to claim over 750 of the 1,243 delegates, about 486 of whom were members of the CIO. The entire 68-member state committee was of the liberal coalition, 20 being CIO members. The *New York Times* complained that August Scholle, director of the state CIO, was the "real head of the convention."

Despite this sensational showing, labor influence in the Democratic Party of Michigan has been limited. As is generally the case with such coalitions, the political basis is a common denominator set by the most backward element. CIO leaders have found that they must furnish most of the money and manpower, while hiding modestly behind those "regular" Democratic elements which official public opinion has decreed, through the corporate-controlled media of mass propaganda, to have a "right" to be in politics. Regular Democrats are always ready to lecture the CIO on its "political naiveté" in thinking that elections are won by issues instead of personalities and precinct work, and the union leaders have shown themselves adept at learning this deep lesson from the politicians. The result has been that labor's strongest single weapon, its aura of a crusade for a better nation, has generally been drowned in the morass of ward-heeling politics.

Moreover, the decline of the machine and the rise of labor have not been clean-cut antipathetic processes. Some of the ward-heelers on a local and national level have learned to take on a labor coloration. What is far more serious, many of the unionists have been absorbed by the pull of machine politics, jobs, influence-peddling, patronage, and dirty in-fighting. As the tone has been set by the top leaders becoming immensely "practical" in their political arrangements, the union political committees and caucuses have become happy hunting grounds for job seekers and careerists.

To one extent or another, the unions have built up political machinery in the major industrial centers. Labor has become an important factor in a continuing coalition within the Democratic Party. While the gains have been meager and the resulting corruption of objectives has been, at times, so great as to make this maneuver look more like a detour than a step along the road to labor's political emancipation, it is hardly a development that can be elbowed aside.

Given the fiasco of the late thirties when the movement was aborted by its own leadership, the Democratic Party road became an inevitable experience for labor. Judged by comparison with the Gompers era, it represents the claiming of higher political ground.

A fresh and venturesome course by labor faces major obstacles. The American labor movement is a broadly based, slow-moving monolith. Its leaders, disposing of great dues income, enormous welfare programs, large staffs, and a carefully built up air of respectability, are timid and not inclined to strike out off the beaten path. Its members, moreover, are by no means convinced that work within the old-party framework is useless. In the above-mentioned survey of Wayne County unionists, *When Labor Votes*, the pollsters found that of the four major groups into which they divided their subjects, the pro-labor pro-politics group, by all odds the most advanced in its attitudes, taking in about one-third of the interviewed workers, was by far the *most* convinced of all the groups that there is an important difference between the two parties.

The depression of the thirties crystallized a certain political alignment in this country which still has not been disrupted. The unionized and progressive-thinking parts of the working population are strongly inclined towards the Democratic Party. It will take major new issues, causing great upheavals in attitudes, to break this pattern in favor of a labor party orientation. New economic troubles, a big debate over foreign policy, a movement for more and better welfare-statism and for greater public responsibility in presently neglected social spheres—one or all of these issues may provide the focus for such a realignment. It is hard to foretell either the issues or the form in which tomorrow's labor politics will emerge. Given the disparity of situations in various parts of the country, we are likely to see a variety of forms, ranging from fights inside the Democratic Party to local independent labor-liberal parties.

But if issues and forms cannot be foretold, the major trend is clear. Labor's political evolution has taken on a scope and forcefulness far beyond anything that can be dictated by short-sighted leaders. If we have been a long time catching up with European labor movements in their independent politics, we have been making important progress, as this review has tried to show. While partisans of independent labor political activity may see little current day-to-day

motion, we may be sure that if Gompers were alive today he would be bewildered by the extent of the change and would consider his own program at least half discarded. And, while motion may be slow at the moment, when American labor does move it tends to do so in sudden leaps.



# THE AUTOMATION PROBLEM

BY WILLIAM GLAZIER

. . . the automatic machine is the precise economic equivalent of slave labor. Any labor which competes with slave labor must accept the economic conditions of slave labor.

Norbert Weiner,  
*The Human Use  
of Human Beings*

**W**HENEVER a new machine or system of machines increases labor productivity in any society, the opportunity presents itself for the working people to live a better life. As far as the United States is concerned, the extent and the timing of any such improvements in living standards depend, of course, upon the outcome of a whole series of economic and political contests between workers and employers. These differences over how the output is to be divided up, and the compromise solutions which result, are usually irrelevant to the production potential of the machines themselves. Similarly, in an underdeveloped country, or in one operating under a planned economy, although the manner in which it is decided how increased productivity will be used is not the same, it nevertheless still holds true that the considerations brought into play are again not directly related to the latent productivity of a new technique or machine.

We must keep this rather obvious point in mind when examining the impact of automation upon labor in the United States. Ours is an economy driven by profit, and this, rather than the dramatic and

even revolutionary effect of automation upon labor productivity, must be our point of departure. It is automation under American capitalism which is our interest, not automation in the abstract. Scientists and technologists may paint pictures of the "push button world" opening up to mankind, but when we try to see how labor in the United States might benefit from it or how labor can minimize the burdens which such a change in the production process would impose on working people, we find ourselves again concerned with those facts about the economic organization of our society which persist despite changes going on in the techniques of production.

Workers, whether organized into trade unions or as individuals, have always faced the introduction of new machines with apprehension and misgiving. Machines displace men, and although social scientists can construct theories which prophesy a painless process of less sweat and toil, higher output, reduced prices, new jobs, a higher standard of living, and more leisure, in practice it rarely works out this neatly. The question for the individual worker—or for his union—is not what will happen to the entire economy in the long run as the result of introducing advanced production methods, but what to do right now about the specific man or woman whose job has been taken over by a machine.

A recent ILO report on automation and technological developments puts the issue in these words:

Thus the long-run outlook is good. But in the meantime many short-run problems have to be met with imagination and vigor. It is significant that most of these relate to the labor and social aspects of technological change rather than to the technical aspects and to our ability as a society to absorb change readily to the general benefit of the people. (Report of the Director-General, Part I, "Automation and Other Technological Development," ILO, Geneva, 1957, p. 3.)

The challenge which automation presents is not a new one to working people. From their point of view, it is still more of the same never-ending scramble to make a living. To the employers and owners of industry, however, the move to automated production opens up the vista of increased profits in a vastly more complex and more unstable economy. They welcome this kind of change.

On the other hand, the spokesmen for American labor complain

righteously at not getting union benefits automatically. A recent conference on automation sponsored by the AFL-CIO's Industrial Union Department heard IUD Director Albert Whitehouse proclaim that

it is time to point out that automation and the other technological changes have failed to bring automatically those things promised so blithely. Where are the great numbers of more highly skilled jobs? Where are the lower prices? Where are the jobs for everybody that were virtually guaranteed us? (Quoted in *Labor Relations Reporter*, May 5, 1958, p. 18.)

And, one might also inquire, what manner of labor leaders are these who count on benefits coming "automatically" to working people?

The workman's sole capital is his labor and his technical skill. Anything which depreciates their value deprives him of part of his property. Because the advantage of machinery lies in the savings in labor which it makes possible, workmen have no alternative but to look skeptically at the promises of a world of leisure which are dangled by the enthusiasts for automation. To most workers technological change always spells trouble.

Unemployment resulting from technological change has been spotty and difficult to isolate from the loss of jobs due to other causes. Through the late twenties of this century the American economy was generally expanding, with the result that workers displaced by machines were absorbed into new jobs. The persistent unemployment of the thirties which amounted to 20 percent of the labor force in 1939 and was still 10 percent in 1941, two years after the rearmament program had been initiated, did not come about because machines were replacing men. However, by 1937, production had climbed back to its pre-depression level while the number of unemployed had increased nearly seven times. How many of these workers were without jobs because machines had displaced them it is impossible to determine.

World War II and the postwar decade were both periods generally marked by the kind of economic buoyancy which minimized the impact upon working people of new labor-saving machines and production methods. Output grew as labor productivity increased, and unemployment was never a serious problem except for the recession months in 1948-1949 and in 1953-1954.

The usual employment pattern in an industry or firm replacing men with machines in these years—recent experiences in the electrical manufacturing industry are a good example—was for the percentage of production workers to decline while the number of professional and clerical employees increased, although not enough to offset the number of skilled and semi-skilled displaced. While output in a given plant thus grew more rapidly than total employment, the overall growth of the economy tended to create new jobs for both redundant workers and young workers entering the labor force. Of course, not all years were equally favorable to the absorption of displaced workers, nor did all industries follow the same growth pattern. But generally this was the way it went.

So much for the past. Meanwhile the recent recession, accompanied as it was by the heaviest unemployment since 1940, brought with it such a host of pressing unpostponable problems to the labor movement that concern with automation receded into the background. When, for example, the steel industry was producing at less than 50 percent of capacity and tens of thousands of steel workers were either wholly unemployed or working short weeks, it didn't make much sense for the union to worry about workers who might be displaced in the future by the prospective automation of production lines. Neither steel nor any other major industry is currently preparing to embark on heavy new investments in automation to make plants more efficient when they can't figure out how to utilize their present capacity profitably.

Edwin G. Nourse, formerly chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, and respected as a conservative academic economist, warned about this condition of overcapacity when he testified at the Automation Hearings back in October 1955. Nourse stated then, long before the present recession had set in:

I strongly suspect that we have already built up at many spots a productive capacity in excess of the absorptive capacity of the forthcoming market under city and country income patterns that have been provided, and employment patterns that will result from this automated operation. . . . We have not yet demonstrated our ability to adjust the actual market of 1956-57, and later years, to the productivity of the production lines we have already modernized. They have not yet come to full pro-

duction, but as they do we see incipient unemployment appearing. (*Automation and Technological Change*, Hearings Before the Subcommittee Economic Report, 84th Cong., 1st Sess., p. 623.)

This existing overcapacity is not only the major cause of the present economic decline; it also explains why automation—despite the great savings in labor costs it holds out—has been introduced so slowly. The heavy costs involved, and the existence of relatively new capacity installed since the end of the war, but still not fully utilized, continue to be barriers. Automation would have to promise enormous savings in operating costs to make the required heavy new investments profitable in the face of existing unused capacity and a declining demand for the products of American industry.

However, it is unnecessary to point out that we are certainly not witnessing today the final collapse of the American economy—far from it. The recession is working itself out and the working people are, as usual, bearing the brunt of the process. We can anticipate some sort of economic recovery before too long although its specific features need not concern us here. It is most likely that precisely in this coming recovery phase of the cycle American labor will feel the first major impact of automation.

A revival of production *without* an accompanying elimination of the new pool of unemployed workers seems to be in the cards. Because the revival of business investment which is necessary to set off economic recovery will be increasingly for labor-saving machinery, there are good grounds for labor to begin thinking now of the implications of automation, the most labor-saving of capital investments.

There seem to be as many definitions of automation as there are experts writing in the field. Each definition, of course, depends upon where one stands in the scale of things. In the frame of reference of this paper, the scientific or technological features of automated productive processes are of secondary interest. What is important are the kinds of change in the structure of production and of industry which result from automation along with the enormous increases in the productivity of labor. For what automation means is that the same output can be produced by many fewer workers; or put another way, it means that the rate at which men are technologically replaced is accelerated.

Although automated machine assemblies are still relatively few in the total of American industry, a sufficient number have already been introduced to suggest their dramatic potential for raising labor productivity. For example, David A. Morse, Director-General of the ILO, stated in his 1957 Report:

Fourteen glassblowing machines, each operated by one worker, now produce 90 percent of the glass light bulbs used in the United States and all the glass tubes used in radio and television (except picture tubes). (*op. cit.*, p. 8.)

The 1955 Hearings on Automation and Technological Change conducted by a subcommittee of the Joint Committee on the Economic Report of the United States Congress are replete with examples of enormous strides in productivity resulting from automated processes. Two workers now assemble 1,000 radios a day, a task which had previously required 200 workers. One man in Ford's Cleveland plant runs a transfer machine performing more than 500 operations formerly done by 35 to 70 men. Forty-eight workers, under automatic methods, now complete an engine block in about 20 minutes, whereas it used to take 400 workers 40 minutes to complete the same job. And so it goes.

In the past when a mechanical device was substituted for manual labor, productivity might have been doubled or tripled. Such increases in output per manhour were on a scale with other improvements in productivity resulting from such changes as better planning and control, better transport, better product design, or just driving the workers harder. What is new about automated processes is that the *scale* of improvement is so much greater. Increases in productivity by 10 and 15 times have now become possible in those places where automation can be applied profitably.

When employers decide to invest in any kind of technological innovation, they do so in expectation of reducing costs. This is the spur. Although labor costs per unit of product are invariably reduced by automation or any other technological improvement, there is no reason to assume that either more units will be produced, or prices will be lowered, or both. In the same way, there is no way to determine in advance whether or how rapidly the labor displaced by an automated process will be absorbed. This will depend upon a

whole series of conditions which are quite separate from the automation; for instance, upon the general economic climate, whether the market for the products in question is growing, how rapidly new workers are coming into the labor force, and so on.

Automation holds out a special kind of advantage to industry. In contrast with previous improvements in methods, or adoption of new machinery, automation makes it possible to operate at a maximum rate for most of the productive day. This results from the self-regulatory system under which machines, and not men, supervise and control other machines. With human rather than machine control of machines, the best that can be hoped for is intermittent maximums. But with the optimal potential under automated processes, the limiting factor is the market for the goods.

Another way to look at the possible advantages accruing from automation was well put by the Director-General of the International Labor Organization in the report already referred to. He remarked (p. 73) that "an element of choice is always involved" in the course of taking the benefits of the rapid increases in productivity and the resultant savings in labor. These savings can go into more production, into profits, into shorter hours, higher wages, or price reductions. And with careful understatement he concluded that "we have seen some sharp differences of opinion on this matter during this last year." (p. 75.)

Automation will undoubtedly intensify these "sharp differences." Even when some workers gain from the increased productivity, their benefits will be substantially less than capital's. Moreover, whatever the gain of certain groups of workers, it will take place at the same time that many other workers become displaced by the new machines. How does a union cope with this kind of situation?

The United Automobile Workers announced early last May that about 500 workers, including some with 30 years of seniority, would be thrown out of work by the closing of the die room of General Motors' Fisher Body Division plant in Pontiac, Michigan. The union, incidentally, was not advised in advance of the company's plans to concentrate this work in a few newer and more efficient plants. All it could do in the circumstances was ask that the men discharged be guaranteed the right to move with their jobs, that the cost of relocating them and their families be paid by the company, and that

adequate severance pay be provided for those who did not wish to relocate. General Motors was under no obligation, it appears, to do any of these things. Nor, it can be added, was there much chance that the company would voluntarily take care of the displaced men.

On the other hand, union policy within a wholly automated plant or department of a plant normally encompasses the usual routine demands for greater job security, higher wages, shorter hours, along with the retraining and upgrading for the men with seniority to fill the new jobs. Frequently union discussions on automation result in demands for guaranteed employment (or wages) and some form of severance pay for the men released. It should be added that because production changes of this kind come about unevenly, and because their impact on both the industry and the firm can be most varied, it becomes exceedingly difficult for a union to work out a general policy that fits all situations.

It is generally held that representatives of the workers should have an opportunity to discuss the introduction of automation *in advance*. Such prior negotiations are considered by many economists and union spokesmen to be the key to insuring that automation will benefit and not harm the displaced workers. Certainly no one would quarrel with prior discussions and negotiations, but one can have some skepticism about the usefulness of such talks unless the union is strong enough to prevent the employer from putting the new production methods into operation. Without this kind of strength—even if it isn't employed—most discussions will be pretty thin on results.

Clark Kerr, new Chancellor of the University of California and a highly respected academic authority in the field of labor relations, argues that the primary contribution of unionism to the long-term productivity of society lies in its participation in the determination through collective bargaining of the rules which apply in the plant or factory. It is his contention in regard to wage discussions—and the point is even better taken when applied to automation—that the discussions are really more important than the outcome:

While the total union impact on wages may not be very great, particularly in raising labor's share of national income, the process of exploration of possibilities by the unions and their acceptance of the results undoubtedly leads to greater satisfaction by the workers with the system of income distribution. There is



a stronger conviction that the results are equitable, or at least inevitable, than would otherwise be the case. *The process may be more significant than the results.* (Clark Kerr, *Productivity and Labor Relations*, Berkeley, 1957, p. 21. Emphasis added.)

Interestingly enough, in this same brief monograph, Kerr maintains that there has been no showing that productivity increases have slowed down over the decades as unions have become more powerful—on the contrary. And further, that there is no showing that productivity increases average less in unionized than in non-unionized industries.

But it is not alone in dealing with employers on the job level that labor will face many new questions as the result of automation. For automation also accentuates some of the broader tendencies under capitalism with which we are already familiar—to name two important ones, that of productive capacity to outrun consumption, and that of production to gravitate increasingly under the control of fewer big firms.

High productivity, instead of being a blessing to the owners of industry, can be a liability when the consumers are not interested in buying or can't afford to buy. An individual firm with increased output as a result of automation might be able to carry on a campaign of costly advertising, special services, and the like, and thereby grab a larger share of the available market for itself. In this way automation—savings from which probably helped pay for the intensified advertising campaign—might be the salvation of a particular enterprise. But it can't similarly be the salvation of the free-enterprise system itself. Because automation doesn't automatically spread more purchasing power around among consumers.

There is no known method—at least to this writer—by which a balance can be continuously maintained between increased productivity and mass purchasing power under our present economic system. Some American labor leaders have urged wage increases in American industry specifically to keep up the market for autos, houses, and other durable goods; good advice, except that if followed it would cut into industry's profits. And since, in the absence of such boosts to purchasing power, as many conservative American economists are now publicly acknowledging, the economy generates capacity faster

than demand, it follows that automation simply aggravates this affliction and the economic declines which are set off by it.

There really are no good grounds for disagreeing with the conclusion that what we have on our hands is an economic system that has no machinery to deal with sweeping technological change smoothly and without bringing about the displacement and unemployment of workers. Automation is not responsible for this condition—capitalism is. And trade union policies are not the vehicle for coping with economic problems of this magnitude.

What about automation's acceleration of the concentration of production in the hands of fewer and fewer large corporations? Carl Dreher in his amusing and instructive little book on automation sagely observes:

Those will automate who have the resources and the hardihood, and from those who have not will be taken away even that which they have. It will be an automation shakeout, and it will hit the smallest hardest. (*Automation*, New York, 1957, p. 115.)

Only the larger and more highly capitalized firms will be able to afford the high initial investment required to install automated equipment. Moreover, there is an obvious advantage in concentrating production in large units turning out standardized products. Only in this way can the fullest benefit be obtained from automation. Small and medium-size firms will just not be able to take advantage of the kind of a switch-over which puts such a premium upon size.

Thus unions can expect, as automation proceeds, that production will become more and more concentrated in the larger firms. These firms will employ fewer production workers while turning out more products. While the scale of production grows, and with it the size of the establishments and the capital employed in them, the number of workers employed will decline. In addition, if the servicing of automated machines is handled by specialized maintenance firms—as will be most likely in the future—employment of production workers will be even further reduced.

A sidelight on displacement of production workers is that the shift of such workers to clerical, service, and other such jobs—which the automation optimists make much of—is a shift directly into areas which most experts expect to be increasingly automated. Routine of-

fice and clerical jobs are ideally suited for automatic machine processes.

On the other hand, as automation increasingly replaces purely routine, unskilled, and semi-skilled labor by automatic devices, there will be a need for a greatly expanded and more highly trained professional and engineering force. Such professional workers have been notoriously anti-union in the past and there is no reason to expect them to be different in the future.

As automation progresses, the unions will find themselves facing fewer but more powerful antagonists on the other side. At the same time the production base of the unions will become narrower, weaker, and less effective.

Frederick Pollock, a leading German authority on automation, even goes so far as to prophesy in his book *Automation* (New York, 1957) that in the new era the strike weapon will lose much of its effectiveness. And he gives as an example a 1954 strike of operating and maintenance workers at the atomic energy plants at Paducah and Oak Ridge. A handful of supervisory employees were able to keep up full-scale production during the three-day walkout because the plants are so highly automated.

There is little doubt that some new kind of polarization of the working class will result from widespread automation. Those factories or plants which are conducive to automation will gradually move out of the orbit of the mass industrial unions. And the union movement, in its structure and organization, will be forced to change with these changes in industrial organization.

How far will this go? There is no way of knowing. One dark prediction from, of all places, an investment firm on the New York Stock Exchange, points out:

If the educational system fails to adapt itself to the new circumstances [i.e., automation], we could conceivably be faced with the problem of what to do with millions of "misfits," people who would simply not be employable in the more advanced industries and would therefore have no way of sharing in the benefits of increased productivity. Some of these people might become and remain totally unemployed, but it seems more likely that in a predominantly inflationary era the bulk of them would provide a low-wage labor force for a sector of marginal, substandard, exploitative industries. On the other side, there would tend to

grow up a professional and skilled elite garnering most of the benefits of rising productivity and developing its own distinctive style of life. A division of this sort once established, would tend to perpetuate itself; the United States would be well on the way to becoming a new form of caste society. (*The Scientific-Industrial Revolution*, Model, Roland & Stone, New York, 1957, p. 45.)

When the Luddites smashed textile machinery and destroyed factories early in the last century, they were not trying to "hold up progress," nor were they opposed to the lightening of their work burdens. These desperate men were hitting back at the greed of their employers and at the organization of society which denied them any of the benefits of the new machines. Their lot was completely miserable and, futile as it was, they smashed machines and burned and destroyed both raw and finished products because this was the only way of fighting that they understood at the time.

American unionists will certainly not follow the example of the Luddites. But how to get the benefits of improved production processes into the hands of the workers still remains. Without fundamental and far reaching changes in the structure of our society, the problem will continue to be with us. So long as the economy expands and grows, the burdens incidental to automation will be solved, or lost, in the general improvement. But when the economy declines or falters, automation will show its other face. American labor will then have to find new resources of strength, spirit, and ingenuity if it is not to be overwhelmed.

# THE WHITE COLLAR WORKER

BY DOUGLAS F. DOWD

The white collar people slipped quietly into modern society. Whatever history they have had is a history without events; whatever common interests they have do not lead to unity; whatever future they have will not be of their own making. If they aspire at all it is to a middle course, at a time when no middle course is available, and hence to an illusory course in an imaginary society.

C. Wright Mills,  
*White Collar*

THE white collar worker, as C. Wright Mills puts it, is one who “manipulates people and symbols, rather than things.” His numbers have expanded spectacularly in the twentieth century, not least in the United States. His influence must be taken into account in any assessment of the main drift of American society—particularly in an examination of the nature and potential of trade unionism.\*

The growth in numbers of white collar workers—primarily professional and technical, sales, and clerical and kindred workers—has been one aspect of the development of industrial capitalism in America. Any industrial society—whether capitalist or socialist—generates

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\* The most comprehensive work on the white collar group is of course C. Wright Mills, *White Collar* (New York, 1951). Mills is concerned with a group broader than the worker group, however.

a white collar group, but if that society is also capitalist, the group will be substantially larger. Industrialism, as it progresses, requires the proliferation of functions entailing the manipulation of symbols—the filing cabinet is itself a fitting symbol of this development—for purposes of analysis, record-keeping, communication, and so on. And industrialism also entails the manipulation of people—by administrators, teachers, and the like—if for no other reason than to bring order and predictability into the functions of large masses. But when capitalist institutions are meshed with the industrial technology, the needs multiply in both these respects.

The institution of private ownership, and the relative fragmentation into competing industrial units that goes with it, means that all else aside, the numbers of bureaucrats (using the term in a technical sense) will have to be some multiple of that needed for a planned economy. (A political parallel may be found in the relative number of “government clerks” needed in the Germany of the petty principality as compared with the Germany of, say, 1900.) Thus, although a “financial sector” must exist in a socialist economy—and would in any industrial society—the number of people required to “service” the economy in a financial sector which is close to purely functional is some fraction of that required by a financial sector in a capitalist economy. For in the latter the number is determined not only by the necessary function which financial institutions perform to lubricate the wheels of industry, but it is multiplied by the existence of private ownership and the profit motive. Every privately owned asset has one or more pieces of paper establishing claim to it, and many of these claims are of course transferred innumerable times in the course of their existence. Moreover, there is profit to be made from (among other things) organizing and handling the life of these claims to ownership, and so we find an enormous number of tiny-to-very-large financial institutions, the function of which would be eliminated the minute production for profit were eliminated.

Add to this, in the American economy, a structure of production and a level of productive capacity which requires heavy and continuous *selling* to keep it operating at anything like reasonable capacity, and we may understand easily the growth, particularly in the last forty years, of an enormous apparatus of salesmanship.

Thus we find that in America today nearly a third of the total work force is white collar, and that about a quarter is in the "trade sector" (defined to include wholesale and retail trade, finance, real estate and insurance, and business and repair services). The difference between the two proportions is made up largely of technical and teaching personnel (excluded from consideration are self-employed professionals—mostly doctors, lawyers, and engineers).

The accompanying table, based on Benjamin Solomon, "The Growth of the White Collar Work Force," *The Journal of Business*, October 1954, p. 271 (this article is a good survey of the relevant statistics), sums up the main facts about the growth of the white collar labor sector. It should be added that of the *total* white collar work force in 1950, Solomon estimates that 15.8 million were wage or salary earners, the remainder being self-employed.

*Growth of White Collar Occupations*

	Clerical and kindred	Professional and technical	Sales	Total
1870				
Number (in millions)	0.1	0.3	0.3	0.7
Percent of total work force	0.8	2.6	2.3	5.7
1910				
Number (in millions)	2.0	1.7	1.8	5.5
Percent of total work force	5.5	4.6	4.9	15.0
1950				
Number (in millions)	7.1	5.0	4.0	16.1
Percent of total work force	12.0	8.5	6.9	27.3

The composition and magnitude of the white collar force changed and grew rapidly in this century, and so did the economic and social characteristics of its members. It is in the determinants of these latter changes that we find much that is analytically critical in assessing the meaning of white collar workers vis-à-vis American trade unionism.

Up until the middle of World War II, the average wages of white collar workers were always higher than the average wages of production workers. There are two principal reasons for this: (1) the farther back we go, the smaller was the group able to enter the white collar work force, for at least a high school education was a prerequisite; and (2) the later in time we look, the better organized the production workers became. That is, the demand for white collar workers in the earlier period was strong relative to the supply; but as time went on the supply expanded rapidly (as a high school education became open to most), and this expansion was accompanied by little effective union organization. On the other hand, the enormous need for production workers during World War II, together with the spread of unionism among them, pushed the average wages of production workers above those of white collar workers, and that situation is likely to continue into the foreseeable future.

A striking confirmation of this causal nexus is provided by the fact that in the nation today, it is only in the South that white collar workers still receive wages substantially above those of production workers—due primarily to the lower level of education in the South, the lower degree of industrialization, the lower degree of unionism among production workers, and the effective closing off of white collar jobs to Negroes.\*

Why has unionization made such slow progress among white collar workers? The average proportion of wage earners under union agreements does not fall below 40 percent (and rises to 100 percent) in the manufacturing industries. Except for workers in transportation, communications (telephone operators, for example), entertainment, and newspapers, the degree of unionization does not rise above 19 percent in the white collar group—predominantly clerical and sales.\*\* Overall, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of white collar workers in unions is about 2.5 million, representing less than 15 percent of all members of national and international unions.

One important factor determining this pattern is the high proportion—about half—of women in the white collar group. It is not

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\* See John P. Henderson, "A Deviation in the Pattern of Relative Earnings for Production Workers and Office Personnel," *Journal of Business*, July 1955.

\*\* See W. S. Woytinsky and Associates, *Employment and Wages in the United States* (New York, 1953).



their sex which makes them reluctant to join or form unions, of course, but their expectations concerning the length of time they will remain workers and the motives which led them to seek employment (often less urgent than those for men, and often partially non-economic). Much of the growth of the white collar work force is to be explained by the increasing availability of women for employment, because of urbanization, smaller families, increasing number of jobs requiring relatively less physical exertion, a changing social attitude toward the proprieties of work, and so on. As will be discussed later, the situation in these regards is likely to change over time, as indeed it is already changing.

Perhaps the major factor holding back unionization of the white collar worker has been his attitude toward his job and the relationship he bears to his employer. Traditionally, the white collar worker, particularly the clerical worker, has thought of himself as being (potentially, at least) on the ladder going up, as a part of the (usually small) firm rather than as a mere hired hand. Traditionally, that is, the white collar worker has thought of himself as a member of the middle class, not of the working class. Stemming from this has been the notion that white collar work is respectable, and that production work is not. Historically, much of this had to do with the qualifications for the white collar job. It was almost always the second, third, or later generation American who became the white collar worker, since he had the needed opportunity to acquire the education which was required for the job. This meant that it was the immigrant, in the popular mind, who did the production, or dirty work. The intense nativism prevalent in this country from the latter part of the nineteenth century until very recently (if not still) solidified these attitudes. Whether or not the white collar worker was in fact going up the job ladder, he was still a white collar worker, dressed like one, and could appear to be genteel, even though he was actually an impoverished sales clerk or bookkeeper.

Both the underlying situation and the attitudes of the white collar worker have been changing, apparently at an accelerating rate, in recent years; and the effect has been to undermine and weaken traditional white collar hostility to unionization. These changes may be briefly summed up as follows: First, since a high school education is no longer the restricted possession it once was, there is less (or

no) reason to take special pride in it. Virtually nobody is now walled off from a white collar job because of lack of education (except perhaps in the South). Second, in these days of high consumption expenditures, and changing roles for women, a decreasing percentage of women look upon their jobs as temporary. The economic motivation of necessity is increasing. Third, white collar jobs are increasingly jobs held in large stores or large offices, as the scale of enterprise has expanded. This means that the sheer problem of organizing has become easier. Fourth, the notion of climbing up the ladder by virtue of starting off as a clerk is dying out, owing to the larger scale of enterprise, the institutionalization of pay raises and promotions (if any), and the increased concentration of control over the processes of economic change. Fifth, the old distinction between the foreign-born production worker and the native white collar worker is for all practical purposes dead. Sixth, the sales clerk or office worker is increasingly confronted by the threat or the actuality of automation, and more easily able to understand the search for job security of the production worker. Seventh, the white collar workers' wages are in fact below those of the production workers, and the gap is widening. The former believes, quite rightly, that unionization is at least partially responsible for the gap. Eighth, trade union membership has become more respectable since World War II. Ninth, the already organized production workers and/or their leaders believe that they would gain from a more fully organized white collar work force. Indeed, much of what unionization exists among white collar workers was brought about directly, or substantially aided, by existing industrial and craft unions (for example, the retail clerks by the teamsters). Finally, the effective resistance of employers to unionization of white collar workers is waning.

Other factors might be mentioned, but the prospect is fairly clear that unionization will increase in the white collar group, although probably never reaching the degree attained by manual workers. For American trade unionism, this means that the aggregate strength of organized labor in this country will increase over time—particularly if, as is likely, further advances take place in the organization of blue collar workers.

It probably means, in addition, that the political conservatism of organized labor in America—already a long-established charac-

teristic—will be further buttressed. With rare exceptions, the background of present and future white collar workers is unlikely to be one of extreme poverty. If they view the economic system as containing imperfections, these imperfections are not likely to take on the magnitude required to stimulate a qualitative rejection of the system. The white collar worker is likely to focus on the grievances surrounding his job—petty except for his fear of unemployment—and on his relatively low pay. These are precisely the areas in which business unionism is able to operate most effectively. The white collar worker's job is likely to bore, to frustrate, to irritate—not to outrage him. And, whatever the reality may be, there usually remains some vague hope of upward job mobility associated with white collar work.

Though he may be driven or pulled into unionism by fear, or hopes of material betterment, the white collar worker has middle class values and his demands on unionism will not go beyond his immediate problems. And, apart from all else, American trade unionism at the present has little else to offer or to suggest to the white collar workers, except its forays into the realm of policy proposals to mitigate unemployment. It is regarding this last point—unemployment—that speculation regarding the white collar worker becomes most interesting.

At the moment it is difficult to see what further possible changes in the economy would contribute to a *relative* increase in the size of the white collar group. On the other hand, there are strong indications that the relative size of the group will stabilize or even decline. The primary factor at work in this respect is automation. The very forces which have given rise to the massive clerical force in modern business have now reached the point where they have made it possible and economical to automate clerical work. This development, as it continues, will affect only a percentage, not the entirety of the clerical force, but that percentage will be significant within even the present generation. On a lesser scale, but still with significance, is the already well developed tendency toward self-service in retail distribution. These developments, when taken together with the growing supply of potential white collar workers and something like the same tendencies in factory production, threaten to create a sizable employment problem in the foreseeable future.

Whether the continuation of business unionism as basic policy among organized production workers or organized white collar workers is likely under such circumstances would be hard to pin down, but at the very least an important realm of speculation is opened up. In order to avoid an unemployment problem of some magnitude, the economy will have to maintain or more probably increase its historical rate of growth (about three and a half percent per annum). Although it would be difficult to argue conclusively that such a rate will not be forthcoming, it would seem to be even more difficult to imagine that rate, or a higher one, without substantial governmental intervention in the economy. "Substantial governmental intervention" does not mean socialism, of course, as events of recent decades should make clear. The quality of the intervention will be determined to an important extent by the pressures brought to bear by organized labor in America.

At this juncture, certainly, there seems to be little reason to expect that the pressures forthcoming from the white collar segment of organized labor—in its present small or subsequent larger magnitude—will be of a kind designed to promote beneficial social change. On the other hand, if social and economic troubles accumulate, the further organization of white collar workers might take place with the labor movement in a new state of insurgency. Despite the rise of the white collar workers to social importance because of sheer numbers, they are not independently led, nor do they form a cohesive social bloc. In the thirties, some of them discreetly followed in the wake of the upsurge of unionism in the mass production industries, and when organized, took their lead from these stronger labor bodies. Indeed in some cities, white collar groups were even good recruiting grounds for the political radicals. If the unions experience a new wave of militancy, white collar workers may very well participate in the parade rather than try to hold it back. But it seems reasonably clear that they will not be the initiators.

# WOMEN AT WORK

BY NANCY REEVES

As I look out into the parking lot and see some of the automobiles of the very finest make, I wonder how many of the women who are helping their husbands out would not better put their services to mankind and to their families by staying home and taking care of their children.

Delegate from Union, N. J.  
to Auto Union Convention,  
Cleveland, 1955

**M**ORE than half a century ago, Olive Schreiner, in her classic, *Woman and Labor*, cried: "We demand that, in that strange new world that is arising alike upon the man and the woman, where nothing is as it was, and all things are assuming new shapes and relations, that in this new world we also shall have our share of honored and socially useful human toil. . . ."

To be sure, women have never been totally excluded from "socially useful human toil." When cottage industries and home workshops became obsolete, women followed the loom to the factories. As for a "share of honored toil," that is another matter. One of the charges against the tyranny of man raised at the first convention for Women's Rights at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848 was, "He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments." The industrial revolution was still young when this was written, yet even then there were more than 100 different occupations, little honored and little

paid, in which women were employed. Apparently too, they have been little sung, for the myth persists that women functioned exclusively in the domestic realm until "modern woman" made her dramatic debut. Actually, women were wage earners before the factory system and continued to be gainfully employed in the transitional period between the old forms of production and the new. In later decades, industrial growth, geographic expansion, immigration quotas, prohibition of child labor, and, above all, the abnormal impetus of war, brought rapid extension of areas of employment for women. But the honors—and the honoraria—still lag far behind those accorded men.

Women have been, and continue to be, a vulnerable group in the market place, serving as the classical labor reserve—supplementing men when there is a shortage, and replacing men when processes make it possible and wage differentials make it profitable. To them, as to other minorities, have been transferred the hostilities engendered by boom and bust production with its cargo of continual job competition and threatening unemployment. And thus has been born the recurrent myth that "women work for pin money"\*—a concept that varies from slur to attack in direct relation to the condition of the economy.

Most women work for the same reason most men do—because they must. They work because they have economic responsibilities; and this is true of women of all ages and of all marital status groups. It has come to be generally accepted that single, widowed, and divorced women should be self-supporting. In 1955, in the 35-44 age group, 82 percent of single men and 81 percent of single women were in the labor force, while in the total 20-65 age group, the proportion was only slightly lower for women. Among women divorced, widowed, or separated from their husbands, nearly 60 percent between the ages of 20 to 65 were in the labor force. But it is not always recognized that many women in these groups are responsible not only for themselves, but also for others. One tenth of all families in the United

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\* The purist will be entertained by the meaning the term pin money has come to have, in contrast to its derivation. Originally, pins were scarce in England and were sold only on the first two days of January. Women saved all year to accumulate the sum necessary to buy a few pins. This was their "pin money."

States have women as their heads. Some 92 percent of employed women who live with their families contribute regularly toward their support.

Despite the great transformation in social patterns, the idea is still not widely accepted that many married women have to be self-supporting. Recently, the "inquiring photographer" of the New York *Daily News* asked: "What would happen if all working wives gave up their jobs tomorrow?" One woman answered that it would be a fine thing: the women would do more good at home and the majority of husbands were able to support their families anyway. Another lady said the result would be to give better jobs to working girls who really needed them; she felt the majority of married women work for mink stoles. One man said it would result in better wages for men. Another man said it would result in a better home life and better opportunities for women who really have to work to support themselves. The actual situation of the married woman in the market place today is at wide variance with these stereotypes.

According to the statistical record, nearly two thirds of all women 14 years and over in the United States are married and living with their husbands. This represents a marriage ratio considerably higher than in former years and is one of the major influences affecting the current place of women in the economy. About 28 percent of these women are in the labor force, and, because of their predominance in the population, they make up more than half of working women compared with 30 percent in 1940. "This trend represents a major social change, far-reaching in its effects." (*Handbook on Women Workers*, Women's Bureau, Bulletin #261, 1956, p. 21.) It is, however, a change which our social structure has not yet digested and to which our social mores have not yet adapted.

The withdrawal of married women from the labor force would be devastating not only for the public economy but for the private economy of millions of individual households. *Womanpower*, a recent book-length statement by the National Manpower Council, sums up as follows:

A 1946 study by the Census found that about one fifth of all women workers in nonfarm families were either the sole earners in their families or earned more than any other member. In about one family in eight, women received half or more of the

total income . . . the great majority worked because their husband's earnings were very low. . . . Together, these groups of women—those who are expected to support themselves and those who provide the main support for a family—probably account for over half of the female labor force. Somewhat less than half of all working women, therefore, are married to men who are the main support of the family. Even in these families, of course, the man's earnings are sometimes so low that the wife is compelled to take a job. (pp. 69, 71.)\*

This then is the answer to the carping letters once again appearing in the press, "Why don't the women go home?" Women have been drawn into the labor force by necessity. And unless a revolutionary plan is developed to have a man shoulder each woman's burden, we can assume that women are in the market place to stay. They cannot be exorcised. They must be dealt with as a reality. And for the trade unions, this reality is that they must be fully integrated into the labor movement.

There are 22 million women in the labor force today—almost a third of the total, as against a fifth some 40 years ago, and it is predicted that they will increase by five million between 1955-1965. Nor does this figure reflect the whole picture since it represents women working or seeking work during a specified period. The fact is that the great majority of women in the United States have had experience in working outside the home at some time. This is one of the revolutionary changes of our time, and one that remains largely concealed in the social mythology by which we live.

### **Wages of Women**

Frieda S. Miller, former director of the Women's Bureau, has observed:

It is a matter of common knowledge that the general wage levels of women are lower than those of men, and that the predominantly woman-employing industries are the low-wage industries. This is still true even though, for decades, women have been an important factor in the labor force. (Women's Bureau Conference, Bulletin #224, 1948, p. 16.)

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\* The importance of need in work patterns is further illustrated by the fact that although 32 percent of white women were in the labor force in 1950, for nonwhite women, the figure was 46 percent.



This is illustrated in a recent tabulation of wage differentials at a lamp plant:

<i>Rates Paid to Women</i>		<i>Rates Paid to Men</i>	
Quality Inspector	\$1.54½	Stock Clerk	\$1.73½
Baser Sealer	1.48	Raw Material Handler	1.69
Stem	1.44	Material Server	1.64½
Matron	1.41	Sweeper	1.59½

A 1954 study of factory median wages tabulated women at \$1.28 an hour and men at \$1.80 an hour.

In the article cited above, Miss Miller goes on to state a principle that is ignored by present labor leaders at their own peril:

It is an axiom of wage theory that when large numbers of workers can be hired at lower rates of pay than those prevailing at any given time, the competition of such persons for jobs results either in the displacement of the higher paid workers or in the acceptance of lower rates by those workers. Over a period of time this pressure tends to depress all wage levels, and unless this normal course is averted by direct action it results eventually in lower levels of earning for all, with a resulting reduction in purchasing power and in standards of living. Because of their new war-born training and skills, women are, as never before, in a position to be used by unscrupulous employers as wage cutters. (p. 17.)

But despite the grave danger that wage differentials pose, trade unions have not organized women workers to the extent they have men. Only 3.4 million working women are union members. This represents possibly a fifth of female nonagricultural wage and salary employees, significantly lower than the percentage of male workers organized into unions. There are a number of reasons for this lag: the concentration of women workers in non-manufacturing and white collar industries; traditional ideas and myths about women workers, such as their temporary status in the labor force; outworn policies of organization.

## Woman's Work

Although a few women were reported in each of the 446 occupations listed in the 1950 census, women are still concentrated in rela-

tively few fields. Some of these are the kind of activity customarily considered to be "woman's work": production of cloth and clothing, care of the sick, and the training of children. Others have become "woman's work" by virtue of recently developed conventions. More women by far are in clerical work than in any other major occupation. The second largest group is composed of operatives, mainly in factory production. Then follow the service occupations, professional work (with two fifths school teachers and one fifth nurses), and private household workers. The figures for 1958 are as follows:

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Number (in thousands)</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Clerical workers	6,241	30
Operatives (semi-skilled) [apparel, laundry, textile, electrical parts, canning, footwear, drycleaning, etc.]	2,985	14
Service [waitresses, cooks, beauticians, etc.]	2,854	14
Professional	2,584	13
Household workers	2,289	11
Sales	1,478	7
Managers, officials, proprietors	1,057	5
Farmers, farm laborers	814	4
Craftswomen, foreladies	220	1
Laborers (except farm)	105	1

The concentration of women in certain occupations develops into a pattern with relatively few men employed in those fields and relatively few women employed out of those fields. Two thirds of all clerical workers and half of all service workers are women. Nearly all private household workers are women. Forty percent of all sales workers are women. Women are 75 percent of all elementary and secondary school teachers and 98 percent of all nurses. On the other hand, despite the complaints about the shortage of skilled workers, women make up only three percent of "craftsmen"—and no crash programs are in the offing to increase their numbers.

In the past, the organization of clerical workers was considered a formidable task. Today this concept warrants reexamination with the narrowing distance between the work bench and the desk as the industrial revolution penetrates the office. Rationalization has attracted and created a new mass of clerks and machine operators whose work increasingly approximates the factory operative. Then, more than a fifth of women workers are employed in manufacturing industries, concentrated in textiles, apparel, and food products. In retail trade, another major woman-employing business, there is also extensive concentration in department stores and other large units characterized, as in the factory, by impersonal relationships between employer and employee.

To evaluate the frequently offered contention that women are temporary components of the labor force is to bring into focus the revolutionary social change that has occurred in the lives of American women. In 1890, seventy percent of all women workers were single, most under 25, and likely to leave employment, never to return, as soon as they were married. Today, three out of five employed women are married and half of them are over 40 years old. More and more women work before they marry, and for a time after they marry, to help establish their homes. They then leave the labor force during the childbearing years, and return when the children reach school age. The typical mother now bears her final child when she is in her late twenties. After 10 to 15 years of marriage, all her children are in school and she is ready to return to the market place. The view "that most women workers are tenuously attached to their jobs is in large measure a carryover from the past, when the female labor force was composed far more than today of young, single women. However, it is not supported by recent information, which shows no appreciable difference in the average quit rates for all employed men and women." (*Womanpower*, p. 28.)

It would seem from the foregoing that when labor casts off its current defensive posture, and can consider "organizing the unorganized" as one of its primary tasks, it will be possible to recruit women to a much larger extent than the apologists intimate, and certainly in much greater numbers than they are represented in the trade unions today.

Some may imagine that if women are concentrated in "women's jobs" they will not undercut wages on "men's jobs" even if they remain outside the labor movement. But the assignment of jobs by sex is fortuitous. Thus, in the Midwest, cornhuskers are traditionally women, while trimmers are almost always men. In the Far West, the reverse is true. In the old-time office, "typewriters" were always male; while the manufacture and assembly of precision electronic equipment is now considered "woman's work." All of which suggests that women's jobs, unlike men's, are made, not born. And no one knows how automation will affect the formula.

One of the key measures to preclude a wage cutting role for women workers is equal pay for equal work. Most unions are formally on record in favor of such a program. But its realization in practice is another matter. At a recent conference with trade union leaders, the participants were asked how unions view job differentiation on the basis of sex. There was no unanimity of opinion.

Some unions oppose this practice, but in many cases, it was said, tradition is accepted and allowed to take its course. Even where there is a national policy opposing such differentiation, locals are frequently allowed considerable leeway in modifying or implementing it. The elimination of differential treatment, it was suggested, is often comparable to the problems of integrating whites and Negroes and its achievement moves at a pace and in a manner that varies with local conditions. (*Womanpower*, pp. 101, 102.)

## Unions and Women

Of course, labor groups are not unaware of the challenge. A Woman's Activities Department has been established within the framework of COPE. Some unions, such as the Auto Workers, have women's divisions. But these are token acts which do not negate the labor movement's overall backwardness on the issue. In an age when women have attained ambassadorial rank and corporation posts, there are no women in the top policy-making councils of labor. The AFL-CIO Executive Council has 27 members but none are women. Similarly, very few women are represented on the national executive boards of unions, even in those where women constitute the vast majority of members. The same is true at

national conventions. Of the 676 delegates at the 1957 AFL-CIO Convention, only 13 were women. The Amalgamated Clothing Workers with a 50 percent feminine membership had no women among its 10 delegates; the Communications Workers with a 65 percent feminine membership had one woman among its 10 delegates; and the United Textile Workers with a 50 percent feminine membership had no women among its five delegates. At the local level, one finds, however, a number of women in leadership positions, so perhaps the walls of prejudice are cracking just a little.

If the unions are to make substantial progress in enrolling women workers, they need in addition to formal expressions of equality, to learn to treat women as equals. The following statement, which appeared in the report of a CIO Family Participation Conference held in Los Angeles in 1954, indicates the all-too-usual situation: "Many of the women emphasized that their own participation in union activities is made difficult by the ridicule and the joking to which they are subjected, when they do speak up at union meetings or in the plants." Recruitment, is, of course, not unrelated to the role of women members inside the unions, and both subjects seem long overdue for union soul-searching even if only in the cause of enlightened self-interest. Women, like other underprivileged groups, know when they are being patronized. If the role of women in the union is secondary, it will be apparent to member and potential member alike, fine-sounding resolutions to the contrary notwithstanding. Education to counter patterns as deepseated as these cannot be superficial and verbal if it is to be effective. It must cut across the entire fabric of union activity and reflect the real integration of women. Until this occurs, the peripheral status of women will continue to militate against the labor movement at the recruitment, membership, and political levels.

### Special Problems of Women Workers

The discussion thus far has considered the importance of women to labor. There is, of course, another aspect: the role of women as it affects women themselves. After the suffrage movement achieved its goal, it was facilely assumed by middle class people that women had been emancipated. Actually numerous injustices still exist. Some

have been touched on above: discrimination in wages and in job opportunities, discontinuity of work life, subordinate position in unions. In addition, women have special health and welfare problems relating to their childbearing function and special fatigue and responsibility problems in connection with their household and family duties. For although woman takes part in the economy on a large scale today and is no longer restricted to private domestic labor, she has not been freed from private domestic labor. She merely does both. Despite all the freedoms woman has won, she has no freedom to choose her work after marriage. At most, she can piece her new functions on to the old tapestry. To a 40-hour week, private domestic labor adds 26-40 hours more, a routine that one authority believes will be described 50 years hence in the same horrendous tones that Dickens used to depict the evils of his time. Small wonder then that her detractors call modern woman the "lost sex"—spanning, as she does, the centuries, in her travels from job to home and back again.

It has been all but forgotten that progressive innovations were introduced during the war. Indeed, it is perhaps heresy to recall that in isolated instances, commercial laundries were set up in the factory so that women workers could bring their load in the morning and pick it up on the way home; and arrangements were made with retail stores for sales persons to come at given hours so that clothing and staple household articles could be ordered. But with the end of the war, such arrangements were abandoned, and most publicly supported child care centers were discontinued. No Federal funds have been allocated for child care purposes since 1946.\*

By contrast, government and industry-supported child care facilities are common in many European countries. Similarly, with respect to maternity, the United States stands alone among advanced countries in having no legislation protecting the jobs of prospective mothers or offering them financial assistance at the time of delivery. In about half the states, women are ineligible for unemployment compensation when they cannot work because of pregnancy. Maternity leave clauses and maternity benefits in collective bargaining agreements are the

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\* The United States was the only major country omitted in a listing of child care facilities published by the *International Labor Review*. (November 1950.)

main present safeguards. However, the patterns of protection vary from union to union; some are clearly inadequate, and in many contracts, they do not even exist. It was revealing to turn to the index of the 1957 AFL-CIO convention and find no reference under the words "maternity" or "child care." It appears that until women are admitted to the policy-making union councils, their special problems of security, equal pay, maternity, and child care will not be given adequate attention.

Objection may be made that this is no time to take up new issues. But these are the very issues that are meaningful to women, and women are the largest contingent of the group that labor is anxious to organize—the 18 million white collar workers. The present union movement has concerned itself insufficiently with the significance of woman's growing status. The traditional woman, who no longer exists, carries more weight at its council tables than the contemporary breathing members. Profound advances have taken place within the social structure. The typical American woman today has climbed over the walls of her isolation and functions in the world beyond the doormat. She is a new person in a new social matrix. The retarding influences are vestiges of an expired past, whereas the achievements are in step with the future. One wonders how long it will take labor to exorcise the ghost and make way for the living.

# THE NEGRO AND THE UNION: A Dialogue

BY SHUBEL MORGAN

No man can put a chain about the ankle  
of his fellow man without at last finding the  
other end of it fastened about his own neck.  
Frederick Douglass

THE following is an imaginary colloquy between a defender of the record of our unions in the battle for full Negro equality, and a critic of the record:

\* \* \*

DEFENDER. I am not so naive as to attempt a categorical defense of the American labor movement on any issue. In George Meany's house there are many mansions. I simply contend that—to quote Jack Barbash's pamphlet *The Labor Movement in the United States*—"there has been a major change in the climate of union opinion" regarding the Negro and his rights. This change is toward the better and, as such, bodes well for our economy and our society generally.

CRITIC. Nor do I wish to cite the sins of the "dinosaur wing" of organized labor to smear the whole. But I cannot see that any significant contribution toward racial equality and justice is being made, or soon will be made, by the AFL-CIO. The policy response on matters of Color has been much like that on Corruption—too formal, too little, too late. But tell me, on what does Brother Barbash base his optimism?

DEFENDER. He points out that there are "a considerable number of unions in which equal treatment is an article of faith. Such unions face up to racial problems through a conscious effort and seek to in-



tegrate the 'minority' group as full participants in the union, through educational activities, fair practice committees, and the like."

CRITIC. I think you would admit that the larger the Negro minority within a particular union, the more conscious (or unconscious) effort is made to achieve those goals.

DEFENDER. Granted. And Barbash, too, agrees in an indirect fashion. He says, "Full employment, or near it, has made it possible for Negroes to get jobs in industry previously denied to them by company employment policies. The union, in order to survive, has had to work for the integration of the Negro worker in the union."

CRITIC. You could also read that to mean management sets the pace, by being the first to lower racist lines.

DEFENDER. And you have to remember that unions are born in a world they never made. But Barbash's main hope lies in "the setting-up of an AFL-CIO Civil Rights Committee manned by a full-time staff, and a constitutional commitment by the AFL-CIO to eliminate discriminatory practices in affiliated unions."

CRITIC. What has the committee done lately?

DEFENDER. It helped get the civil rights bill through the last Congress. A weak thing, perhaps, but something. And they are continuing to demand further Congressional action.

CRITIC. Oh? I hadn't noticed it. Nor have I seen any massive discipline invoked upon the unions which continue to ban Negroes from membership or conspire with management to deprive them of seniority and upgrading rights.

DEFENDER. I will concede that racial discrimination has not evoked the thunder of disapproval accorded Communism and Corruption. But you must consider AFL-CIO internal politics. The lily-white building trades, buttressed by the Teamsters, formerly dominated the Executive Council. Now, with the shift in power to the industrial unions, George Meany is talking out of the CIO side of his mouth. A recent article in *Reporter* magazine gives a good account of how he is prodding some of the backward brothers. Were it not for the recession, I wager that you would be well aware of AFL-CIO concern. . . .

thing to talk about besides racial matters. Or rather, when they do

CRITIC. It strikes me that the AFL-CIO will always find some-

talk, it is a banal rehashing of the headlines in an ADA-tinged resolution. They never make the headlines. They have not launched a single major project for civil rights in the North or South. Reuther's name on the letterhead of the NAACP is the most dramatic gesture.

DEFENDER. Labor lobbied for FEPC laws in those states which have them.

CRITIC. Yes, a few unions did. But could you tell me if the AFL-CIO is still in favor of a national FEPC law? My eyes aren't very good on fine print. However, the sort of thing I am referring to is this:

In the South, in 1955-1956, before there was a McClellan Committee or a recession, 40,000 Negroes in Montgomery, Alabama, staged perhaps the greatest strike in the history of this country. For better than a year they maintained a bus boycott, resisting all repression, acting in disciplined, self-sufficient fashion that exceeded a picket captain's fondest dreams. As a matter of fact, a principal strategist in the boycott was the president of a Sleeping Car Porters local. There were plenty of times when the Montgomerians sorely lacked both cash and sympathy—but, with the exception of the Sleeping Car Porters, the Packinghouse Workers, and a couple of UAW locals, the unions defaulted.

The major labor angle to come out of the situation was the formation of a KKK-oriented "Southern Federation of Labor." This outfit actually posed a "raid" threat to some large Steelworkers locals in Alabama, gathering momentum from AFL-CIO silence on the issues. Finally, because of the ineptness of the SFL promoters, the threat fizzled, and the AFL-CIO press has been gloating ever since—but the "triumph" is comparable to that of Eisenhower over McCarthy. AFL-CIO silence on the issues continues to this day.

But I suppose you will tell me that the problems of merger diverted the conscience of the AFL-CIO?

DEFENDER. No. I will say simply what I have heard from many union staff guys. The white Southern rank-and-filer is oftentimes the best unionist in the country—except on *one* issue. The Southern worker had a harder fight to get his union and he values it more. Several internationals have derived much of their leadership and program from their Southern locals. Good leadership and good program—except on *one* issue.

The hard question therefore faces many unions, assuming good will on the part of their national officers: Why risk gutting the organization in the interest of a gesture, however worthwhile? They understandably choose an easier, slower route—education of their membership.

CRITIC. Without casting aspersions on the virtues of education, I have to interject that most union educational programs—leadership schools or whatever—seem to concern themselves mainly with negotiation and grievance procedures, or with intra-union politics. Racial matters get a real softpedal, becoming inaudible the further South you go.

Furthermore, co-operation with the NAACP stops at the Mason-Dixon line. And, as I understand it, an informal, but inflexible blacklist bans any support for several Southern interracial organizations. The only group that is pure is the Southern Regional Council, whose Ford Foundation grant keeps it from doing much else besides making “surveys.”

Here is a Northern example: In an Ohio city a Steelworkers local (predominantly Negro) went on strike at a foundry because the company refused to upgrade a Negro worker. He had been employed there for more than ten years. “They promoted past him foreigners who couldn’t speak English—they promoted anybody who was white,” to quote one of the strikers. The company reached the newspapers with its version of the walkout—namely, that the union was trying to dictate policy on incentive pay. No mention of color. And there was an editorial tut-tutting about 400 people giving up days and days of wages to win a few more cents an hour for one employee. The Steelworkers international representative refused to make any statement. Fortunately, after more than a month, the strikers forced the company to submit to arbitration and the man won his promotion.

But I can’t help thinking that the Steelworkers missed a fine opportunity to call attention to one of the grosser industrial inequities in the area, and to their own, in this instance, heroic role. Or did they fear, because this sort of injustice is so prevalent, that they might open a Pandora’s box?

DEFENDER. Unfortunately, unions are democratic—even in being undemocratic. “The problem of civil rights in the union reflects the

tensions and views of the population at large," Barbash says. Education must precede action. I think you know the Steelworkers have produced a movie on segregation in housing.

CRITIC. Yes, and it avowedly suggests no remedy to the situation.

But let me clarify my fundamental disagreement with you. You are looking forward to what the AFL-CIO might eventually do *for* the Negro. I am concerned with what the AFL-CIO attitude toward the Negro is doing *to* the union movement. For the past ten years, union membership in this country has remained stationary. Losses through automation have barely been offset by the "business union" type gains of such outfits as the Teamsters. Furthermore, cardholders far outnumber *members*, even in the most democratic unions. The old, declining industrial areas are unionism's strongholds, while the new, booming regions are virtually wilderness.

DEFENDER. Now come on, you can't hang all these things on one hook. Unionism can be its own worst enemy at times, but there have been plenty of outside pressures at work.

CRITIC. And those pressures are still at work. But how will the unions ever defy them if they do not find a new vitality—a new "ginger" group to bolster their ranks? Negroes have played a crucial role on several occasions in union history. They tipped the balance in the mines of West Virginia, at the Ford River Rouge plant, and in the Chicago packing houses.

Today, because so much industry has moved South and because so many Negroes have migrated North, they are nationally strategic. And they are natural union material: wage-earners, organization-minded, and possessed of a class consciousness unequalled by any other native Americans.

But in the South, the timidity or outright hostility displayed by unions since the Supreme Court desegregation decisions has tended to make the Negro distrust them. He has moved closer to his church and fraternal organizations—where, as witness the Montgomery and Tallahassee boycotts, the needs of human dignity, if not economic needs, are well served.

In the North, I find Negro unionists who suspect and discount the programs of their unions because they have seen how slow the union reflexes are on racial matters. Even though their own locals may be honestly integrated, they know that Southern locals often are

not—and that national officers usually compromise with the Southern view. Smart managements take advantage of this situation by voluntarily easing color lines at the plants. They *deliver*, and they make good company men out of many a potential union militant.

DEFENDER. I will concede to you the existence of these disturbing factors. But I think you will concede that the Negro is better off with a union than without one. The economic gains he has made thereby have paid for some of this ferment for complete equality. Only during World War II did the Negro obtain relatively easy entrance to unions. He has not yet acquired the sophistication—of the Irish, say—necessary to manipulate organizational politics. As several of the more decent Southern Senators tell Negro leaders in their states: You get the voters on the books and I'll stop filibustering. The same process will occur in the AFL-CIO, in time. I will not say that Meany, Schnitzler, Reuther, or several others will be around then—but it will occur.

CRITIC. I am only afraid that before the process you describe can take place, the Negro will get tired of waiting. He had to move on his own with the March-on-Washington movement to get Roosevelt to sign the wartime FEPC. And he has had to move on his own to try to get the Supreme Court decision observed. If labor hopes to get Negro grass-root backing, it will have to go a lot further than the halting steps it has taken up to now.

So far, we have, as regards the Negro, another of the failures of nerve which cumulatively threaten to make organized labor an adjunct of the Civil Service system: pure, gutless, and the easy tool of a plutocratic Washington.

# CORRUPTION AND RACKETEERING

BY DENNIS ANDERSON

These fellows [labor crooks] are really all right when you get to know them. After all, they are just out for themselves, like you and I. You couldn't expect them to act differently.

A trade association lawyer  
to the author:  
Harold Seidman,  
*Labor Czars*

**I**N 1957 a special committee of the United States Senate brought before the public dramatic revelations of widespread corruption in the American labor movement. The revelations led to a vehement outcry against labor union practices, some of it based on genuine indignation, some of it exploited by those with a vested interest against organized labor. Before the special committee had attained its first birthday, the AFL-CIO had expelled three unions with one tenth of the federation's total membership on the charge of domination by corrupt elements. While the public at large may have been startled by these developments, to students of the labor scene the only surprise was the vigor of the unions' reaction. For corruption had long been both prevalent and tolerated in the labor movement. The phenomenon has roots extending back at least three quarters of a century, imbedded deep in the fiber of the American economic system.

The use of a union post for personal self-enrichment was first practiced by some "walking delegates," the early full-time officials who were labor's answer to the violent employer offensive following the Haymarket Affair of 1886. Tough men who were not dependent upon the employer for their jobs were needed to deal with him as equals. The walking delegates were granted considerable authority by these unions, notably the right to call a strike without consulting the members. Not all the delegates used their new-found powers to the exclusive benefit of the workers they represented.

Since the walking delegates spread quickly in the relatively well-organized building trades, an industry both speculative and seasonal, their power to stop work gave them especially strong economic leverage upon construction industry employers. Extortion, through phony fines for alleged infractions of union rules, or less subtle means, became a workaday affair. Nor were all employers loathe to engage in the practice. Once they realized that it was cheaper to pay off a delegate than to suspend work, many of them became willing partners. Besides, the cost could be passed along to the consumer.

The atmosphere prevailing in the labor movement toward the turn of the century was conducive to such transactions. The radical Knights of Labor had declined and the conservative AFL was growing. Based on a thin slice of skilled workers, the AFL was the embodiment of "business unionism." The average AFL leader was primarily interested in selling his members' skills as dearly as possible to the employer. To do this, he sought a monopoly control over the labor supply in his trade. He saw himself as an entrepreneur of labor. Class solidarity had little real meaning. Devoid of missionary zeal and witness to the fabulous enrichment of American capitalists, the business unionist could easily succumb to the temptations offered by his position of power. Seeing no basic conflict with the employer and out to establish complete control over jobs in his trade, he had only to formalize his cooperation with the employer to become a labor racketeer.

While most of the early labor practitioners of corruption merely succumbed to the morality of the market place, the first major union crook—Sam Parks—came to this calling as an agent of an employer. The George A. Fuller Construction Company of Chicago had recognized Parks' talent for brutality. Bringing him to New York in 1896

in an effort to widen its market, the company astutely cast Parks in the role of organizer of the housesmiths (iron workers). Within a few weeks he had literally beaten the New York housesmiths into line. From there Parks expanded his control to include the New York building trades, which he dominated until 1903. The Fuller Company never had "labor trouble" during this period.

Sam Parks spent \$150,000 from the treasury of the Housesmiths Union in three years; in addition, he derived untold amounts in bribes from employers. He dispensed jobs to his friends and deprived enemies of their livelihoods. Yet this violent, self-seeking man also raised the wages of iron workers from \$2.50 to \$4.50 a day. Upon his first arrest for extortion in 1903, Parks was voted \$1,000 by his union and re-elected to office. He beat the charge, but was soon sentenced to Sing Sing for a similar offense.

In other industrial centers, building trades officials carved lucrative empires for themselves, becoming the partners of employers and the kingpins of politicians. There was "Skinny" Madden of the steam-fitters, who gained control of the construction industry in Chicago between 1898 and 1908 by means of terrorism and graft. During the same decade, in San Francisco, P. H. McCarthy rose from the presidency of the Building Trades Council to the mayoralty of the city. These early officials had assembled the basic elements of labor racketeering: the crooked labor leader, the local businessman, the protective city government, and strong-arm men. Gangsters were later to replace the amateur plug-uglies. Cooperation was mutually beneficial: the political boss provided legal protection; the union boss provided necessary money from the treasury and jobs for the political machine members; the businessman provided more money for the union boss and for the political boss. In return, from the politician he received protection from city laws and the favor of city contracts; from the union boss he secured workers at cheaper prices than he could otherwise get them.

The evolution of such local alliances permitted the creation of tight industrial monopolies. In New York, a semi-illiterate former Canadian dock-builder named Robert P. Brindell became a millionaire in the early 1920s by fashioning a cartel composed of the Building Trades Council, the Building Trades Employers Association, and Tammany Hall politicians. So high did the prices of housing in



New York City soar as a result that the state legislature launched the well-known Lockwood Committee investigation.

Until the lawless era of Prohibition, the corrupt union leader was largely an indigenous product. He had usually worked at his trade, become a full-time official, and followed the lure of the dollar rather than the call of working-class solidarity—often with the daring of the robber barons who were spawned by the same growing capitalist system. In the 1920s, outsiders began to discover the material advantages offered by the business of labor. Gangsters, brought in originally as mercenaries for the combatants of industrial warfare, gained control of some of the unions which employed them. By the early 1930s, organized crime had successfully infiltrated important segments of the big city labor movement. Alongside the individual corruption of the home-grown labor racketeer was erected an apparatus which could systematically channelize profits to the underworld.

The first gangsters used by labor unions were hired to ward off the crushing attacks of employer-paid thugs during strikes. The International Ladies Garment Workers Union employed the notorious “Dopey Benny” Fein in its 1909 strike, discovering to its chagrin that this purveyor of “muscle” did not accept temporary jobs. Joseph Belsky, now a vice-president of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters, has recounted the self-defensive use of “Dopey Benny” by the infant Hebrew Butchers Workers Union in its 1913 strike, a move which caused a crisis of conscience among the idealistic immigrant members, most of whom were not yet initiated into the mores of industrial America. (Joseph Belsky, *I, The Union*, Raddock Brothers, Yonkers, N. Y., 1952, pp. 31-64.)\*

The needle trades qualified as a breeding ground for racketeering because of the intense competition among many small, marginal employers. Eager to preserve their competitive edge based on cheap

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\* Ironically, this book about a union's early struggles against employer and gangster opposition was published by Maxwell C. Raddock, whose *Trade Union Courier* has been the target of a Federal Trade Commission “cease and desist” order and AFL-CIO condemnation as a racket publication. Raddock was also accused before the McClellan Committee of plagiarizing the material for a book about deceased Carpenters President William L. Hutcheson, a book which cost the union \$310,000.

labor, some clothing employers called in the Arnold Rothstein Mob to keep the Amalgamated Clothing Workers out. Under Sidney Hillman, the Amalgamated retaliated by hiring the audacious Louis "Lepke" Buchalter to protect it from Rothstein. The sequence of events was explained by *Business Week* in its "Special Report" of August 31, 1957: "The most that can be said in mitigation of the Amalgamated's part in the entente of racketeers and labor is that it used them in self-defense. Employers used them first."

Lepke helped the union grow through protection, all the while growing more powerful in the process during the years 1920-1929. Using the ACW as a stepping stone to the big time, Lepke, with his partner, Jacob "Gurrah" Shapiro, took over the so-called Jewish Mob upon Rothstein's death in 1928. Thereafter, he became a silent partner in clothing, trucking, baking, fur, and other enterprises. Rothstein had paved the way to many economic areas for Lepke and Shapiro, beneficiaries of employers whom Thomas E. Dewey castigated as having "invited racketeers to 'organize,' as they call it, the industry." The transaction was strictly *quid pro quo*: the racketeers found investments for their "hot money," while small businessmen found capital which was otherwise unavailable, and sometimes established cartels to eliminate competition.

Forced to the wall by Lepke's growing control of local unions as well as numerous men's clothing firms, Sidney Hillman decided to fight. There ensued an incredible two-year struggle in which Hillman formed an alliance with some of the major employers to force out Lepke union officials and Lepke-owned companies. By the end of 1932, the underworld chieftain was beset with other troubles and decided to cut his losses in the men's clothing industry. This was an exceptional case. Most unions found it extremely difficult to shake gangsters loose, once they gained a foothold.

Until the depression of the 1930s, labor racketeering was only a sideline for most of gangland's leading figures. But when severely limited purchasing power reduced the profits from bootlegging, they had to find new outlets. Repeal of Prohibition accelerated the gangsters' search for new pastures. Apparently they had successes. In 1932, the president of the Chicago Crime Commission reported that "fully two thirds of the unions in Chicago are controlled by or pay tribute directly to Al Capone's terroristic organization." (Harold Seidman,

*Labor Czars*, New York, 1938, p. 116.) In Detroit, Cleveland, and elsewhere, other gangs followed suit.

Two entire unions came under the control of the Capone forces. In 1934, Capone started to take over the Building Service Employees, a bulwark of the AFL. He arranged for George Scalise, a convicted extortioner and white slaver, to become vice president of the union. Until his new job, which he received without benefit of election, Scalise had been employed as a professional strikebreaker. Three years later, Scalise was appointed by the union's executive board to succeed the deceased president. Also in Chicago, in 1934, George Browne of the International Association of Theatrical and Stage Employees went into partnership with a gangster named Willy Bioff. With the aid of the Capone organization, Browne took over the presidency of the union and Bioff was appointed his assistant. Together they extorted money from theater owners, under the supervision of a Capone overseer. In 1936 they moved on to bigger game, the Hollywood motion picture studios, which were offered "labor peace" and limited union demands in return for payoffs. In 1941 the Capone associates in the two unions were jailed, Scalise for stealing \$60,000 of the union's funds, Bioff and Browne for extortion.

The lawlessness, possibilities for quick riches, and social fluidity which characterized American society molded some labor leaders as well as the business community in the pattern of corruption. Success, measured by money and power, earned respectability for the crooked labor leader in the business world. Like his employer and politician counterparts, he has been accepted most widely when known as a "smart operator," connoting the ability to perform questionable deeds without getting caught. Relations between corrupt business, labor, and political leaders have been intimate and open. The current furor over labor racketeering should not obscure the likelihood that the same employers and legislators who are in the forefront calling for reform may well be patronizing the crooked labor official after public attention has abated. Even the presence of professional hoodlums in the union movement has its origin in the mores of the business community. From the time of the Civil War, American employers were in the habit of hiring private armies of thugs and gunmen to keep their workers cowed.

Mob control of unions diminished after the flowering of the

New Deal, although this by no means removed the causes or the existence of corruption. The spread of reform government deprived the machine politicians of some of their favor-dispensing privileges, federal and state criminal prosecutions sent many of the gangsters to jail, and the rise of the CIO brought to the fore a more idealistic labor leadership obliged to deal with corporate giants which were not, in most cases, susceptible to an easy shakedown.

As the CIO grew older and more bureaucratized, this idealism dwindled. But in its turbulent 20-year history the younger federation never produced a brood of racketeers, nor did organized mobsters successfully penetrate its unions. Corruption of another hue appeared, however, in the CIO's more conservative wing. The United Steelworkers, organized from the top down largely by veteran staff men from the United Mine Workers, evolved into a relationship of collusion with the top management in the industry. Benefits for the members were negotiated, with the corporations passing the costs along through price boosts. And following the pattern set by many AFL officials before him—and adhered to by many others today—President David McDonald consciously tried to emulate the employers' standard of living.

The CIO was obliged but once to chastise a member union for clearly corrupt activities. Following disclosure of welfare fund abuses by five New York locals of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union in 1954, CIO President Walter Reuther warned the union head, Max Greenberg, to clean up the situation or face possible removal. The RWDSU then suspended four of the locals, the fifth later being expelled for refusing to accept trusteeship. Significantly, this lone case of corruption occurred in an industry of small, competitive businesses, not of mass production.

During the lush war and postwar years, the traditional forms of racketeering revived within a number of AFL unions. David Dubinsky had marched his Ladies Garment Workers back into the AFL in 1940 on receiving a vague promise that racketeering would be fought. But the promise was quickly forgotten. The policy of complete autonomy for each affiliate permitted corruption to exist unchecked. Since the Teamsters and the Carpenters dominated the Executive Council, there was little likelihood that top AFL leaders would take any initiative which might upset business as usual. Al-

though Dubinsky continued sporadically to speak up, his efforts were invariably beaten down. Well integrated into the unions' political machines, the corrupt elements had far more power than any combination of their foes.

In 1953, the AFL departed sharply from its *laissez-faire* tradition. The massive thievery by officials of the International Longshoremen's Association uncovered during the New York Crime Commission investigations received enormous publicity. ILA officers had taken payoffs from stevedoring and shipping companies, and employed muscle men and the control of jobs to terrorize the workers, loot the treasury, and share in the proceeds from loan-sharking and cargo and baggage theft. "At the top level, where the figurehead was a florid plug-ugly named Joseph P. Ryan, the union was a political auxiliary of Tammany and an economic auxiliary of the Shipping Association." (William J. Keating and Richard Carter, *The Man Who Rocked the Boat*, New York, 1956, p. 90.) The new AFL president, George Meany, felt the organization was publicly compromised and had to act. Thanks to an accidental lineup of forces which included the Teamsters, who had jurisdictional ambitions on the waterfront, the ILA was cast out by the 1953 AFL convention. Despite concerted aid from city, state, and federal authorities, the rival union established by the AFL was unable, in three successive elections, to unseat the ILA as spokesman for Port of New York longshoremen.

When the AFL-CIO merger was consummated in December 1955, the issue of corruption was buried in a myriad of organizational problems. But the new constitution provided for the creation of an Ethical Practices Committee to keep the federation "free from any and all corrupt influences." No one was expecting any drastic action, however. Indeed, the AFL-CIO took no action for the first six months of its existence.

But a new internal alignment began to develop on this issue consisting of President George Meany, the industrial-type unions of the AFL such as the Ladies Garment Workers and the Machinists, and a bloc of CIO unions led by Walter Reuther. Since the ex-CIO officials occupied only slightly more than one third of the seats on the Council, this alignment produced but a bare majority on the federation's highest policy-making body. Subsequent Council votes on suspension of affiliated unions did not accurately reflect the extreme

caution or the outright hostility of a sizable number of its members who were acting under duress.

As Senate committees unraveled the sordid stories of corruption in some AFL-CIO unions, the Executive Council adopted Codes of Ethical Practices during 1956-1957. The heart of the Codes is the statement on conflicts of interest, setting forth in detail the types of business investment by a union official which interfere with the performance of his duties.

Largely dependent upon the subpoena power of Congress to provide the facts, the AFL-CIO moved first against three small unions which had already been exposed by the Senate Labor Subcommittee on Pension and Welfare Funds. The three—Allied Industrial Workers (formerly UAW-AFL), Laundry Workers, and Distillery Workers—were found to be dominated by corrupt elements and directed to purge themselves. The AIW was found guilty of taking no action against Angelo Inciso, who squandered the welfare monies of the union's big Chicago local, and John Dioguardi (Johnny Dio), who specialized in creating bogus locals in New York to extort money from small businessmen. These two hoodlums were allowed to resign, Inciso taking his members and a treasury of \$300,000 with him. The Laundry Workers and Distillery Workers were guilty of serious welfare fund abuses. An insurance broker with mob ties, Louis B. Saperstein, was involved in both funds. Saperstein and Laundry Workers Secretary-Treasurer E. C. James performed the impressive feat of diverting in a five-year period over \$1 million from a welfare fund covering only 65,000 workers. The looting in the two unions included exorbitant commission payments, kickbacks and special expense payments to union officials, and diversion of premiums to someone other than the insurance carrier.

Congressional investigations did more than provide information; they also acted as the spur. Generating an inordinate amount of publicity, often of a lurid type, the McClellan Committee hearings confronted the AFL-CIO leaders with the prospect of an aroused, hostile public opinion. Without such publicity, it is doubtful whether the anti-corruption forces in the federation would have been able to press their campaign with very much success.

During the early phase of this drive, it appeared that justice was a function of size, with punishment meted out only to the small.

However, as the McClellan Committee delved into the financial affairs of Teamster President Dave Beck, it became apparent that the AFL-CIO would have to face the chance of a collision with its largest affiliate, the 1,400,000-member trucking and warehouse union. Beck, with considerable justification, had proudly proclaimed himself a businessman. He had invested union funds to advance the private business interests of himself and his family, borrowed \$200,000 from a trucking firm under contract with the union in return for a previous loan to the firm of \$1½ million in Teamster funds, used at least \$370,000 in union monies for personal purposes, and entered into a number of shady but lucrative financial deals with Nathan Shefferman, operator of a nation-wide union-busting agency. By May 1957, the AFL-CIO made the first incision in what was to become surgical removal of the Teamsters from the body of the labor federation, ousting Beck from the Executive Council for "gross misuse of union funds."

Extensive use by Beck and other Teamster officials of their constitutional privilege against self-incrimination before the McClellan Committee led the AFL-CIO to elaborate a special policy on the Fifth Amendment. A labor official may exercise his constitutional rights, said the Executive Council, but if he "decides to invoke the Fifth Amendment for his personal protection and to avoid scrutiny . . . into alleged corruption on his part, he has no right to continue to hold office in his union." (*Proceedings*, Second AFL-CIO Convention, pp. 57-58.) The federation denied that it was subverting the Fifth Amendment. Its goal was to cooperate with legitimate investigations by public bodies and to require full accounting by labor officials of their stewardship. The new policy was viewed as a capitulation to the witch hunt in some quarters which otherwise staunchly supported the clean-up drive. "Surrender of the Fifth Amendment, in my opinion," asserted Transport Workers Vice President Ellis Van Riper, "is the first step in the eventual establishment of a dictatorial state in this country. . . . Stop running scared. Let's tell the people our house is clean. If it is dirty, we will damn well sweep it out, but we will not give up any of the democratic rights that our forefathers fought so hard to achieve." (*Proceedings*, Tenth Biennial Convention, Transport Workers Union of America, AFL-CIO, 1957, p. 194.)

The Senate hearings revealed two kinds of corruption: misuse of

union positions for individual self-enrichment; and the penetration of unions by underworld hoodlums who systematically drained the treasuries and used the union's power for extortion purposes.

Bakery Workers President James Cross stands out in the first category. In his early days Cross claims to have been a leader in the Progressive Miners of America. Shortly before his Ethical Practices Committee appearances he had shown a flash of independent thinking by suggesting that American labor needs its own political party. Yet Cross had seen nothing wrong with accepting loans from an employer with whom the union had a contractual relationship and spending union organizing funds on a lady friend.

In the case of the Allied Industrial Workers, the Laundry Workers, and the Distillery Workers, the unions were victims of systematic parasitism, with crooked officials in alliance with professional racketeers. The Teamsters Union seems to have combined both types of corruption, although the underworld apparently has not achieved hegemony in the conduct of its affairs.

James Hoffa, who was to succeed Beck as president of the Teamsters Union, was found guilty by the AFL-CIO of selling out his own members in a flagrant conflict of interest case. After Hoffa negotiated settlement of a strike by driver-members who leased their own trucks to an employer, the drivers were discharged and a new firm was set up to lease this equipment. Its sole stockholders were Mrs. James Hoffa and Mrs. Bert Brennan, wife of another Teamster official. The new company returned dividends of \$125,000 between 1949 and 1956. Other accusations against Hoffa included the borrowing of money from employers and his own business agents, enabling an insurance company controlled by his racketeer friend, Paul Dorfman, to become the carrier for the welfare fund under his jurisdiction despite its exorbitant rates, and bringing notorious criminals into the union.

The AFL-CIO's campaign against corrupt elements came to a climax at the Atlantic City convention in December 1957. The Teamsters, Bakery Workers, and Laundry Workers, as well as Paul Dorfman and Charles Naddeo (who controlled directly affiliated federal locals), were expelled by dramatic roll-call votes. The Distillery Workers and the United Textile Workers avoided this fate by giving assurances at the last moment that they would work with an AFL-



CIO "monitor" to clean house. The Allied Industrial Workers Union had already changed its leadership.

Despite the sensational disclosures, no organized opposition group appeared within the Teamsters Union. The nature of both the union and James Hoffa helps explain this lack of schism. As the union became more centralized in recent years and adopted regional collective bargaining—largely under Hoffa's impetus—it did an effective job of improving the members' income and working conditions. If the officials "get theirs," reasoned many of the rank-and-filers, "it's OK as long as I get mine." This prevalent attitude removed a potential source of serious discontent.

Moreover, Hoffa could adopt the pose of the persecuted champion of the underdog. Subpenaed by a hostile Senate committee both before and after expulsion of the union, brought to trial on a variety of charges, proclaiming his desire to cooperate with all unions, the Teamster president was in a position to evoke the sympathy of his membership. Unlike Beck, he had been careful to maintain good rapport with his mass base. Hoffa speaks the language of the workers and nurtures a reputation as a successful negotiator. A biography prepared under the direction of his "braintruster," Harold Gibbons, observes:

Hoffa prides himself on his refusal to lose touch with the rank-and-file membership. He boasts that he personally knows more Teamster members in Detroit than any of his business agents. He is "Jimmy" to every member. (*The Name is Hoffa*, Teamsters Joint Council No. 13, St. Louis, 1956, p. 15.)

Jimmy Hoffa, labor leader, business entrepreneur, associate and employer of hoodlums, friend of Republican politicians, nevertheless has no swimming pool and wears no flashy clothes. Hoffa embodies the elements of the Sam Parks tradition of corruption, save one: he has eschewed ostentation.

The AFL-CIO launched new unions in the bakery and laundry industries to replace the expelled affiliates. However, the economic power of the Teamsters, upon whom many unions are dependent for the success of strikes, and the lack of a coherent opposition among the membership, precluded the formation of a rival trucking union. The federation then waited eight months before ordering a number of affiliates to sever their mutual assistance pacts with the expelled

union. Whether this renewed attempt to isolate the Teamsters will be any more effective than the first remains questionable. In view of the strategic importance of the truck drivers, the AFL-CIO has had to permit continued cooperation at the local level.

During the same eight-month period of inaction toward the Teamsters, there were signs that the AFL-CIO anti-corruption campaign had dissipated. There were indications of an attempt to white-wash the Operating Engineers, although the McClellan Committee had revealed that the leaders of this construction union had deprived over half the membership of their right to vote, forged collusive alliances with employers, maintained a reign of terror, and squandered the members' money. And, as time passed, it was difficult to understand why, at least on the grounds of consistency, the mobster-dominated Distillery Workers, and the United Textile Workers, where dishonesty was more individual but nevertheless tenacious, had not been expelled. The former has changed some faces but retained its old, corrupt leadership through convention action. Progress in the latter has been painfully slow.

Goaded by continued exposures, the 1958 mid-summer meeting of the AFL-CIO Executive Council authorized varying degrees of supervision over the Operating Engineers, Carpenters, Jewelry Workers, Hotel and Restaurant Employees, and Meat Cutters. Another decision was of minor but symbolic importance: Walter Reuther convinced a majority of the Executive Council to abandon the cherished AFL tradition of mid-winter meetings under the pleasure domes of Miami Beach. But the anti-corruption drive is up against a dilemma: the AFL-CIO cannot continue to expel a growing number of unions. In the case of the Longshore Union, and now of the Teamsters, the expulsion has not dislodged the old leaders. It points up the difficulty in trying to solve the problem of corruption by purely administrative means.

Progress has gone this far: Labor is now committed to an explicit statement of union morality. The Ethical Practices Codes must be adopted by all AFL-CIO unions. Careless union officials have tightened loose financial practices, particularly in the operation of welfare funds, and the new legislation will further improve their operation. Notorious thugs like Johnny Dio and Angelo Inciso no longer enjoy the respectability offered by a berth in the "house of

labor." Unwholesome parasites like Paul Dorfman, who used to gravitate around the fringes of every Executive Council meeting, are gone. Perhaps most significant, the old-line business unionists have been placed on the defensive. But the AFL-CIO reforms will be felt primarily at the administrative level; they still need sustained rank-and-file enforcement to bring them to life.

Yet, as Bert Cochran has pointed out, no big rank-and-file movement developed in response to the McClellan hearings which could revitalize the labor movement at the grass roots. One major difficulty is that internal democracy has been wiped out in large sectors of the corrupt unions. The official who uses his union post for profit wants a minimum of surveillance. His ideal working conditions consist of monopoly control over both jobs and information. This is found most readily in such unions as the Longshore Association and the Building Trades where the power to hire and fire has been traditionally wielded by the labor officials. The most notable exception to this rule is the International Typographical Union, as strongly dedicated to job control today as it was a century ago, but where a fierce attachment to democracy has shut off avenues to corruption. Labor corruption starts when the union leader considers that he is in business; it flourishes where the possibility of protest has been stifled.

It is significant that membership control was the major pre-occupation of the newly chartered AFL-CIO Bakery Workers union. Victimized in the past by James Cross's domination of a hand-picked Executive Board, the delegates to its first convention approved some novel constitutional features. These include a requirement that the board must always have a majority divorced from any financial dependence upon the international union, to be elected by secret-ballot referendum of the membership. Another provision establishes a special panel to serve as a check and balance against arbitrary use of trusteeships over local unions. With more than half the membership of the old union organized through a nine-month string of election victories, the new AFL-CIO union is a small model of what can be done to oust corrupt control with a small bank account but a large measure of rank-and-file participation.

Labor corruption will not be eradicated by union administrative reform or government legislation, although it may be curbed in spe-

cific instances. It will emerge again and again while the social conditions which produced it continue to exist. In the absence of a higher ethic, its corrosive influence extends much further than the labor embezzler and the official who invests union funds in a private business. It reaches the leader who consciously sells out his members in return for a favor from an employer, and the one who sells them out unconsciously because soft living has made him forget the pressures of necessity. It touches the member who condones a payoff to a union official as long as he himself is "taken care of," and the one whose capacity for indignation has long since gone numb. It motivates the worker who gives Christmas gifts to the business agent in charge of hiring, and the man who accepts the gifts. It is the breeder of cynicism in a movement which thrives only when possessed of a militant faith.

To the extent that the labor movement adopts standards different from those of the business community, and a greater measure of participation is exercised by the membership, the carrier of corruption, the "fast-buck" philosophy of a society geared to personal profit, will tend to disappear.

# BOOKS ABOUT AMERICAN LABOR

BY DAVID HERRESHOFF

Nothing in education is so astonishing as the amount of ignorance it accumulates in the form of inert facts.

Henry Brooks Adams,  
*The Education of Henry Adams*

**L**IKE the wage workers themselves, books about American labor are not at present entirely organizable. Some fall within the Commons-Perlman Wisconsin school approach. Some are continuators of the Barnett-Hollander contribution. Many are less well defined and pursue various labor-liberal and pluralistic trends. Several studies follow the Stalinist Marxian tradition.

While the Wisconsin school declined in post-Roosevelt America, its decline has not been accompanied by a gain in influence of radical writings about the labor movement. Socialist interpreters have in the main grown less radical, and the Communist-influenced school of labor studies has virtually collapsed. Meanwhile liberal and academic-sociological trends have expanded in scope and influence. To express the shift symbolically, the cult of Sidney Hillman and Walter Reuther has grown at the expense of the cults of Samuel Gompers and Karl Marx. My purpose here is to discuss the main trends of thought about labor as they find expression in books of the last two decades. It will serve this discussion to preface it with some remarks about Wisconsin labor theory in the years before the CIO.

Wisconsin labor union theory begins, with Commons, as an attempt to explain the peculiarity of the American labor movement. It rests on two major theorems. The first is that in America the unions originated prior to the industrial revolution in response to the development of regional and national markets; it is the market, therefore, and not change in the process of production resulting from technological development, which defines the structure and activity of the American labor movement and the psychology of the American worker. The primacy of the market promotes the rise of unions exclusively concerned with protecting their members' "property rights" in their jobs and favors craft rather than class consciousness among the workers.\*

The second theorem is that the emergence of the AFL under Gompers as the dominant American labor organization is a manifestation of the law of the survival of the fittest as it operates in human history. Perlman cites four attributes which equipped the AFL for survival. "The unionism of the American Federation of Labor 'fitted,' first, because it recognized the virtually inalterable conservatism of the American community as regards private property and private initiative in economic life." Second, the AFL understood the limited possibilities of political action under American conditions. "It went into politics primarily to gain freedom from adverse interference by judicial authority in its economic struggles—it did not wish to repeat former experiences when trade unions standing sponsor for a labor party found themselves dragged down to the ground by internecine strife." Third, "the unionism of the Federation was a fit unionism to survive because it was under no delusion as to the true psychology of the workingman in general and of the American workingman in particular. It knew that producers' cooperation was a beautiful but a really harmful dream. . . ." The AFL, finally, "was also without illusions with regard to the actual extent of labor solidarity. . . . Where conditions made cooperation between different crafts urgent, it was best obtained through free cooperation in 'de-

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\* Commons' thought shows vestiges of populist radicalism which are not continued in Perlman. As Philip Taft, himself of the Wisconsin school, suggests, the main concern of Commons was to shield the AFL against open-shoppers; Perlman's concern was to shield it against the criticisms of radicals. (*Proceedings of Third Annual Meeting, Industrial Relations Research Association*, Madison, 1951, p. 141.)

partments' of unions in the same industry—each union reserving the right to decide for itself in every situation whether to cooperate or not." (*A Theory of the Labor Movement*, New York, 1928, pp. 201-203.)

These theorems voice the characteristic feelings and attitudes of the "pure and simple," "job-conscious" unionism of the Gompers officialdom in the AFL. They were a response to nineteenth-century conditions, and they became anachronistic along with the *laissez-faire* economy which nurtured them. The CIO contradicted the Wisconsin assumptions and prognoses. But cultural lag is strong in the social sciences, and the school has continued in being, although its influence is a long way behind what it had been in the twenties.

The taste and smell of the CIO labor awakening in the mid-thirties were caught by Edward Levinson, *Labor on the March* (New York, 1938); Bruce Minton and John Stuart, *Men Who Lead Labor* (New York, 1937); J. Raymond Walsh, *The CIO: Industrial Unionism in Action* (New York, 1937). These books form a brilliant, lively background against which to view the often ponderous, though not always understanding, studies of the unions appearing in more recent years. Hope and urgency glow in their pages, and they remind us that a period of labor upsurge encourages bold generalizations. Other useful books of the years between the emergence of the CIO and the coming of the war include Benjamin Stolberg's *Story of the CIO* (New York, 1938), and two by Herbert Harris: *American Labor* (New Haven, 1939) and *Labor's Civil War* (New York, 1940). The last-named, containing a strong plea for labor unity, prophesies that "in the reallocation of personnel which would accompany any AFL-CIO fusion inheres a brilliant opportunity for the former to expel its handful of racketeers and for the latter to oust its fistful of Stalinists." The anti-Communist note in both Stolberg and Harris anticipates the later general attitude of many socialist and liberal writers. Harold Seidman's *Labor Czars—History of Labor Racketeering* (New York, 1938) studies a problem rooted in "class collaboration for profit" and the stifling of democracy and militancy in unions. Making use of the disclosures of the La Follette Civil Liberties Committee, Leo Huberman analyzes the methods by which the employers sought to keep unions out of the mass production industries, in *The Labor Spy Racket* (New York, 1937).

With these books and many others to follow, most writers on American labor began to align themselves against Perlman's contention, reiterated as recently as 1951, that American labor still moves pretty much along the old Gompers road. Labor and academic liberals, socialists, and Communists—all are generally agreed that the post-CIO labor movement does not harmonize with the Wisconsin theory. But the writers who reject the Wisconsin interpretation of the labor movement do not agree on what to put in its place. Among them, only the Communists and those influenced by them can be said to constitute a school.

Students of unions who are, for the most part, disciples of the Johns Hopkins economists George E. Barnett and Jacob Hollander, have concentrated on analyses of union structure and practices. Using old and new techniques of the social sciences, these scholars have gathered data on the running of a number of unions and have described the attitudes of groups of union members. Through their works one views social reality as through the eye of a fly: the facts are perceived without being focussed into a single picture, and the unorganized facets of reality are contemplated without a keen sense of the passing of time.

The tradition of labor studies stemming from Barnett flowers in Lloyd Ulman, *The Rise of the National Trade Union* (Cambridge, 1955). Ulman analyzes the constitutions, convention proceedings, and periodicals of the Bricklayers,' Carpenters,' Printers,' Molders,' and Bottle Blowers' unions in the last half of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth. From these sources he culls information, some of it intrinsically interesting, about the relative importance of national, local, and city central labor bodies in collective bargaining and other lines of labor action. From his imposing accumulation of facts he timidly concludes that national unions in the United States reflected "the primacy of the method of collective bargaining; by confronting the American worker with a unique combination of opportunity, insecurity, and a relatively high standard of living, the developing economy helped to produce the national trade union." Ulman advances this conclusion with caution for he feels that the record of some union other than the five he has studied "could yield new hypotheses and conclusions." The tradition which Ulman continues is long on facts and short on synthesis.



Writers displaying an identifiable commitment which is not Wisconsinite but is anti-Communist, approach the labor movement from both liberal and quasi-socialist standpoints. One can call them "labor liberals," or, if they are union leaders or staff members, "social unionists"—to distinguish them from business unionists. Twenty years ago these men and women, typically, were under Marxian influence; but since then their radicalism has cooled, leaving them, for the most part, without an integrated theory. In this respect they are closely attuned to the American labor movement as it exists today. For the joining of the two wings of the house of labor in 1955 was made possible by the decline of CIO social radicalism on the one side and the partial abandonment of traditional AFL narrowness on the other. The result has been a labor federation whose potential is handicapped by intellectual inadequacy. One cannot regard the non-Wisconsin, non-Communist writers who are oriented toward the contemporary labor movement as a school. They are too variegated for that—some of them showing a strong residual or a burgeoning radicalism, others clustering about a dead-center liberalism, still others gravitating toward the Wisconsin position, or so immersed in the specialized routines which occupy union technicians that they feel no need for any perspective. Within this broad and diverse category of labor writers, a number, like J. B. S. Hardman and Jack Barbash, have maintained an interest in labor's outlook and future.

Hardman believes that the Wisconsin scholars understood the pre-New Deal labor movement better than the radicals. "The identification [by Commons] of the factor of job-consciousness in the workers' outlook deflated the then current terminology of class consciousness. The latter, in terms of American experience throughout the period, was altogether unreal: there could be no genuine class consciousness where men did not stay put in permanent, stratified classes, or at least were not convinced that they would for long; certainly they were sure that their children would not be proletarians forever." But absence of class consciousness "would in no way justify the assumption that American workers, and their organizations, lacked in considerable social awareness, and that they would not on occasion 'reach for the stars'—a statutory crime in the Wisconsin code of exemplary labor conduct." Americans have never been frightened

of grand aims, and "the 'core-substance' of unionism is an ever evolving contest for a satisfying share in carrying on the business of living within the reach or the outlook of the nation and the time." The CIO, unforeseen in Wisconsin theory, saved the American labor movement from "aggressive senility." It was a response to the needs of the time, "in the teeth of such theories as 'no politics,' no 'mixing with the middle class,' no engagement in 'visionary goals.'" At present, the workers have attained a "consciousness of kind" which is broader than the old job and craft consciousness but which is not Marxist class consciousness. (*Third Annual Meeting, Industrial Relations Research Association*, pp. 153-154.)

*The House of Labor* (New York, 1951), edited by J. B. S. Hardman and Maurice Neufeld, is a collection of articles written mostly by present or past union staff members, devoted to the internal functioning of unions. It is useful in two ways: It acquaints the reader with both the scope of union activity and also with the viewpoint of the union technicians who, according to the Gompers rules, should advise but never lead, and who, understandably, are sometimes dissatisfied with the role assigned them by tradition. Another book fulfilling this double function is Jack Barbash, *The Practice of Unionism* (New York, 1956). A reading of Barbash suggests that the union technician lacks critical independence in his appraisals of union leaders and their policies. Still, Barbash wishes the union leaders would indulge in "a little less posturing, a little less conspicuous consumption, a little less use of the phrases 'my union,' 'my members' . . . It can mean the difference between enlisting loyalties on the basis of intellectual and emotional attachments or solely on the basis of usefulness. Historically, movements, including the labor movement, have had to fulfill both needs in order to survive and grow."

Appraising in *The House of Labor* the state of the labor movement since the CIO and World War II, Hardman finds that "American labor unions have become a social power in the nation and are conscious of their new import." The new and improved situation of the labor movement results from economic expansion which "found a labor leadership willing to utilize helpful circumstances." Hardman considers the problem of union democracy under contemporary conditions to be increasingly complex. With the enormous growth of workers' organizations, town-meeting procedures become less ap-

plicable. Furthermore, "union democracy obviously can be fairly judged only in the light of the state of the art everywhere. And as to that, perfection is rarer than compromise. Franklin D. Roosevelt had to cope with the Hagues, the Kelleys, the Pendergasts, and even Woodrow Wilson had to take political cognizance of the pork-barrel legislation processors of his time." Compare American unions to the Democratic Party, in other words, and it will be seen that the unions are not especially undemocratic.

Hardman's defensive response to the circumscription of democracy within the unions draws attention to a vital distinction between the radical and the labor liberal approach to the labor movement. The labor liberal inclines to acceptance of the existing labor movement as the norm. He does not feel that there can be too great a difference in kind between the political and social institutions which represent the capitalist social order and those which are created by the labor movement. But the radical views the labor movement as a reaction against capitalism and the potential bearer and prototype of institutions which are more democratic than those which characteristically arise in the capitalist environment. The knowledge that bossism is normal within the Democratic Party, therefore, does not allay the apprehensions of the radical about the lack of democracy in the unions. His criterion for judging the health of the labor movement is his normative conception of its potentialities.

Turning now to the next school: Philip S. Foner conceives of his *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (New York, Vol. 1, 1947; Vol. 2, 1955) as a replacement for the hitherto standard *History of Labor in the United States* by Commons and associates. Foner's energetic research through the memoirs of labor leaders, unpublished theses, and the AFL archives brings to light information which corrects the Wisconsin scholars on minor points of fact, and which, more important, recovers the record of forgotten class battles. Of greater significance for this discussion is his quarrel with the Commons group over the interpretation of labor history.

Foner rejects the Commons image of American labor as job conscious rather than class conscious. In opposition to Commons, he represents the workers as having attained a consciousness of long-run class interests well over a century ago. Thus he asserts that during the first Presidential term of Andrew Jackson, "most workers" cri-

ticized Jackson's "connections with Tammany, his militaristic views, his partisanship in turning opponents out of office, and his contempt for the rights and just claims of the Indians." Before the Civil War the "wage workers," in Foner's view, "understood that not until slavery was smashed could the working class advance." In interpreting the draft riots which broke out during the Civil War in such working class centers as New York City and the Pennsylvania mining districts, Foner suggests that only "a small section of the working class, chiefly the unorganized, succumbed to Copperhead propaganda."

The concept of a working class endowed with class consciousness, but with a perverse genius for picking leaders who lag behind the rank and file in awareness of the workers' strategic and tactical interests, appears in Foner's discussion of Powderly, DeLeon, and Gompers. Powderly and his associates in leadership are made to shoulder entire responsibility for the failure of the Knights of Labor. "Had the other general officers," Foner speculates, "displayed characteristics different from those of their superior, the unfortunate influence exercised by Powderly might have been nullified." However, "like Powderly, they were not well grounded in issues of major concern to the workers, and found it difficult to mingle with the rank and file." Foner scores De Leon and Gompers for failing in the 1890s to promote a people's anti-monopoly coalition. If such a policy had been advocated by the leaders then, it "would have met with almost unanimous support in labor circles."

A class-conscious working class beset with leaders who misrepresent it appears again in the appraisal of more recent events and persons in Richard O. Boyer and Herbert M. Morais, *Labor's Untold Story* (New York, 1955). In the Boyer-Morais explanation of the purge of left-wing unions from the CIO a decade ago, the vulnerability of many CIO left wingers as a result of their lack of independence from the sudden shifts of Kremlin policy is studiously ignored, as is the pervasiveness of frenzied anti-Communism in the union ranks. "The plot to divide the CIO," say the authors, "was at all times a design of the CIO's cold war leadership. It never had the approval of the CIO rank and file."

Characteristic of this school is a persistent exaggeration of the workers' radical propensities and an unwillingness to regard the working class as a contradictory entity which evinces, in the course of

its historical evolution, immature or reactionary moods and attitudes as well as bursts of high political sensitivity and heroic idealism. Another characteristic, painfully evident in its discussions of the labor history of the last thirty years, is its trust in the wisdom of the Communist Party—an organization which, it would seem, marches from strength to strength in the van of the mass movement. To maintain this trust demands arduous apologetics.

It might help at this point to contrast the different approaches with reference to their respective normative concepts of the labor movement. For the Wisconsinites, the normal labor movement is the parochial business unionism of Gompers—a reality of the past. For the radicals, the normal labor movement is a broad socialist unionism—a potentiality of the future. For the Barnett-Hollander school, there is no norm—the unions are not seen as a movement but rather as atomized structural entities. For the labor liberals, the normal labor movement is the “social unionism” of Reuther—the reality of the present. The labor liberals receive their norm from the present reality passively, instead of trying to impose their norm on the given labor movement. Their relation to the world helps them to observe and describe but hinders them from ordering their impressions and thoughts. Both the Wisconsin and radical doctrinaires, by contrast, have often permitted their attachment to their respective norms to obscure their vision when they look at the contemporary movement.

Making use of the insights and procedures of Marx, Weber, and Veblen, the independent sociologist C. Wright Mills integrates his materials into a discernible pattern without doctrinaire manhandling of them. In *The New Men of Power* (New York, 1948), he focuses on the plight of an economically virile and politically impotent union movement. The union officials are unlikely to lead a political movement, “for their character and the tradition of the organizations they lead have selected and formed them as different sorts of men: many are indeed the last representatives of economic man.” Yet an independent labor party is needed if an alternative to an increasingly business-oriented government is to be found. Mills analyzes the devolution of inspired labor leaders into pedestrian administrators and provides a biting critique of “liberal rhetoric” as a factor of befuddlement in industrial relations. In his study of the new, non-property-

middle class of employees (*White Collar*, New York, 1951), Mills examines a social trend which challenges the future of the working class as a history-making agency. He concludes that the white collar people will follow business or labor, depending on which of these two social forces appears to have the upper hand.

Two useful works on labor political action in the 1950s are Fay Calkins, *The CIO and the Democratic Party* (Chicago, 1952) and Arthur Kornhauser, Harold L. Sheppard, and Albert J. Mayer, *When Labor Votes* (New York, 1956). *The CIO and the Democratic Party* analyzes five election situations in 1950 in which the CIO Political Action Committee worked, or attempted to work, with the regular Democrats. The more memorable episodes are the Taft-Ferguson Ohio Senatorial race, the campaign for G. Mennen Williams in the Michigan gubernatorial election, and the effort of Willoughby Abner, an officer of the Chicago CIO, to win a Democratic congressional nomination in the Illinois primaries. *When Labor Votes* studies the political attitudes of auto union members in the Detroit area in the hope of providing "deeper understanding of working people's motivations and feelings as these affect their political outlook and behavior." While the data of the study consist of interviews with auto workers before and after the 1952 election, the authors go beyond the particular locale and year, attempting to discover basic and stable trends in labor political action. The idea that the forms of labor political action have changed significantly is flatly challenged from a Wisconsin standpoint by Mark Perlman in *Labor Union Theories in America* (Evanston, Ill., 1958). "Unions," he asserts, "are today no closer to engaging in direct political action—that is, becoming part of one party's political machine—than they were in 1912." Unions "have never concluded a blanket alliance with a national party machine. . . ."

The Wisconsin view of the internal politics of the unions has been recently restated by Philip Taft in *The Structure and Government of Labor Unions* (Cambridge, 1954). Taft thinks that union elections at the national level seldom become contests between the incumbents and opposition candidates because of the popularity of the existing leaders, because rival leaders compromise their differences so as to present to the public a picture of harmony within the unions, and because the leaders respect the opinions of their membership.

He regards factionalism within a union as undesirable and holds that the salaries of national officers—in the light of their duties and responsibilities—are not excessive. To him the powers in the hands of national union leaders are neither too great nor unwisely used. The machinery of discipline works smoothly and the opportunities for appeal are adequate. Thus Taft in this work carries forward the traditional Wisconsin approbation of the union status quo.

An unfavorable report on the bodily health of the unions is made in Seymour Martin Lipset, Martin A. Trow and James S. Coleman, *Union Democracy: The Internal Politics of the International Typographical Union* (Glencoe, Ill., 1956). The book studies the only American union to enjoy a continuous fifty-year tradition of internal democracy based on the existence of two parties within the organization. *Union Democracy* casts an ironic light on the “anti-totalitarianism” of the present leaders of American labor. The authors suggest that “business unionism, as a set of ideas justifying the narrowest definitions of a union’s role in society, also helps to legitimate one-party oligarchy, for it implies that union leadership is simply the administration of an organization with defined, undebatable goals.” They see as a source of evil for American unions the very outlook which the Wisconsin scholars regard as a source of virtue.

The resolution of the tension between independence and docility, and bureaucracy and spontaneity, is unfinished business of the labor movement. The uncertain final character of the movement is mirrored in the continuing quarrels of the interpreters of labor. Marx had expected the growth of socialist and democratic consciousness in the workers, in America as elsewhere. Commons did not bar a future radicalization of labor organizations, but the Wisconsin school in the main charted a growing conservative “practicality,” an ever firmer subordination of the anti-capitalist intellectual visionaries in the movement to the Gompers business types. In opposition to the Wisconsin interpretation, Communism, the “official” Marxism of the past generation, was so compounded of dogmatism and special pleading as to be unable to leave any lasting intellectual imprint. The spokesmen of the union technicians have discerned changes in the labor movement which overthrow the Perlman codification of Wisconsin labor theory, but contradict traditional Marxian expectations about the American working class.

It would be well if an independent American Marxism could enter the discussion to present a workable interpretation of the labor movement. For despite two decades of intensive research activities, the labor academicians are floundering without any acceptable theory. And, as Joel Seidman and Daisy L. Tagliacozzo say ("Union Government and Union Leadership," in Neil W. Chamberlin, Frank C. Yurson, and Theresa Wolfson, eds., *A Decade of Industrial Relations Research, 1946-1956*, New York, 1958), "The time is probably ripe for new theoretical insights into the nature of the labor movement and for an integration of the knowledge based upon the empirical material accumulated in the postwar decade."



# THE TAFT-HARTLEY DECADE

BY BERT COCHRAN

. . . is it true that the leaders of our movement are to be the first of our mighty hosts of eight million members to put their tails between their legs and run like cravens before the threat of the Taft-Hartley bill? I am reminded of the Biblical parable, "Lions led by asses."

John L. Lewis  
at 1947 AFL Convention,  
San Francisco

**T**HE American scale is big and the trade unions have grown up to the same measure. The American trade union movement towers above all other trade union organizations as American industry towers above British, German, or Scandinavian. Most of the European unions have organized a larger percentage of the work force than the American, but the very breadth of the American trade union structure—with almost twice the membership of the British, with its 125,000 signed contracts, its approximately \$600 million a year income and a roughly equal amount in local and district treasuries, its 650 weekly and 250 monthly publications, its 20,000 full-time national officials, organizers, and staff technicians and additional thousands in the localities, its multi-million dollar buildings and office establishments—place it in a class apart. In terms of manpower, resources, and bureaucratic machinery, the American trade unions are

the most powerful in the world—facing also the most powerful adversary in the world.

The very massiveness of the structure gives the labor movement social weight and latent powers of resistance, excellently shown in labor's contrasting fortunes in the two post-World War reactions. It is part of the historical record that after the nation won the wars for democracy, once in 1918, and again in 1945, labor, on each occasion, had immediately thereafter to face a sustained onslaught. Gompers' AFL did not have what it takes and succumbed to the attack: the steel strike of 1919 was crushed; the miners retreated under threat of government injunction; the packinghouse victory was quickly dissipated and the industry resumed open shop operations; the railroad shopmen's strike went under the knife. Employer paternalism was the order of the day as the AFL lost its war-time membership gains and slid back to below the three-million mark. The unions stagnated during the twenties, surviving as isolated enclaves on the fringes of the economy. It was a far different story with the labor movement forged during the New Deal. The 1945-1946 strike wave was victorious all along the line, and came up with the first round of postwar wage increases. True, the employers had more success after they shifted their offensive to the political field and secured passage of the Taft-Hartley law. But even in the ensuing ten-year retreat, the unions continued to expand their membership with the growth of the labor force. The membership stood at about 13 $\frac{3}{5}$  million in 1945 and 17 $\frac{1}{2}$  million in 1956. If we divide the latter figure by 51,878,000 non-agricultural employees, union strength in 1956 would be a third of non-agricultural employment. If we eliminate a number of virtually unorganizable categories, and those not eligible for membership, we get the unofficial union calculation—40 percent of its theoretical potential.

As Leo Huberman indicates in his article after reviewing some of the testimony before the McClellan Committee, the struggle against unions is going on today as it did before the advent of the CIO. We have only to mention Kohler, Perfect Circle, Square D, Louisville and Nashville, Southern Bell, Westinghouse, to recall that embittered strikes are also not unknown in the fifties. But overall, the struggle has assumed generalized political forms in an attempt to housebreak and contain the unions. Many of the biggest corporations cannot

operate any longer on an open shop basis. Outright union-busting now takes place mostly in the unorganized sectors.

The union movement has held its own as a bureaucratic structure, even if it has not displayed much prowess in carrying the attack to the opponent. In the economic field, the unions are a substantial institution of a different order of power from the twenties. In the old AFL, labor unions were usually able to raise the wages of their members above the general level, but their wage rates set no pattern for the country as a whole. With the unions now bargaining for such a sizable part of the work force, amounting to 100 percent in some of the country's basic industries, the major wage agreements set a pattern that is followed to one degree or another throughout the business community. In the political field, the "reward your friends, and punish your enemies" policy is likewise practiced on a qualitatively different scale. The unions have built a considerable machinery in the form of political action committees in the localities, positions of strength within the Democratic Party in many industrial centers, and a network of alliances with liberal political figures on the city, state, and federal levels.

The bureaucratic front looks solid, substantial, and even imposing. But behind the facade resides a creature wracked by disease. Despite its institutional strength, the trade union movement has been on the defensive and in retreat for a decade. The unions showed more political muscle inside the Democratic Party and the legislative halls twenty years ago when they were half their present size. Rather than mount a campaign to repeal the Taft-Hartley law, the unions have had rained on them an unending stream of hostile rulings from the National Labor Relations Board (the most recent consequences of which have been the setback in the department store field in Toledo, and the breaking of the O'Sullivan Rubber strike), the ICC attack on the "hot cargo" clauses in Teamster contracts, the passage of "right to work" laws in 18 states, and a renewal of unfavorable court judgments. (The recent Supreme Court decision permitting scabs to sue unions in the state courts has perilous implications.) The very idea of a labor counter-offensive is forgotten. Union officials are busy trying to fend off additional punitive legislation. Even social security legislation enacted during the New Deal has been permitted to erode. For example, unemployment insurance benefits—

the most touted of the "built-in stabilizers" of the new peoples' capitalism—have been steadily chipped away so that by now employers have cut their tax rates by two-thirds and reduced average benefits to about one-third of weekly earnings compared to about half in 1935 when the law was passed.

The new organizational campaigns announced at the time of the AFL-CIO merger have been stillborn. There is no substantial organization of new fields in progress. The South remains the haven of the open shop and runaway plant. Chemicals and textiles are largely unorganized. No inroads are being made among white collar workers. The breakthrough into new fields took place during the CIO crusade from 1935 to 1941. The next big membership gains came during the war when the established unions mushroomed out in their jurisdictions under the "maintenance of membership" clauses that they secured from Roosevelt's War Labor Board in return for the no-strike pledge and the wage freeze. Their expansion since has been primarily a reflection of the expansion of the work force in the unionized industries.

Traditionally, the American trade unions have not been front-line fighters for civil liberties. The craving for respectability and approbation of official public opinion has led the average conservative union official to shun associations with radicals, or those who might be tagged as radicals—even though such aloofness would endanger civil liberties, which are necessary foundation stones of free trade unions. But the labor record of the past decade has probably plumbed new depths in opportunist short-sightedness and bigotry. CIO officials got involved in the witch-hunt by themselves employing McCarthyite tactics against Communist opponents. The crooks and panderers in the AFL found anti-Communism a superb patriotic shield for their sordid transactions. Other more disinterested officials were animated by anti-Communist attitudes no different from those of officials in the American Legion or Chamber of Commerce. The labor movement has scarcely lifted a finger in the specialized sphere of government industrial security regulation, an area which directly endangers union contractual procedures. Even when the independent West Coast Longshore Union was able, through court action, to breach the Coast Guard blacklist, the decision was promptly sabotaged by the AFL-CIO maritime unions. Apathy, timidity, drift, as well as

small-time opportunism—officials are able to rid themselves of opponents or potential “trouble makers” by getting them dismissed as “security risks”—these are the determinants, rather than the welfare of the labor movement as a whole.

The role of the unions so far as the transcendent questions of our time are concerned—war and peace, the H-bomb, nuclear testing, co-existence, colonial freedom—has been equally undistinguished. During the war, labor officials accepted appointments to various advisory commissions and boards. Some of the more socially alert labor officials got big notions of labor’s coming role in foreign policy making. At the time, there was a considerable amount of criticism of “striped pants diplomacy” in the labor press, and demands by people like Irving Brown, Victor Reuther, and George Baldanzi, that labor officials be appointed to authoritative posts. Of course, these soap bubbles were quickly pricked after the war, and labor has relapsed into its traditional position as the object, not the subject, of foreign policy. The truth is most labor officials are too provincial to have informed opinions on these matters. The membership rightly feels that it cannot receive guidance in this complicated sphere from union officers. Recently, there have been a few token gestures of progressivism, as when Walter Reuther and Jacob Potofsky signed citizens’ declarations calling for a halt in nuclear testing, but in the main, labor has been a faithful servitor of the cold war, while George Meany and a group of officials have been at pains to identify themselves with its most reactionary and uncompromising advocates.

It might seem visionary to berate a labor movement for its indifference to civil liberties, or its support of the cold war, when it has permitted some of its leading unions to become sinkholes of speculation and corruption. Many might think it more important first to install better locks on the treasury boxes, and devise improved procedures for voting on union contracts, before we get unduly exercised about unionizing unorganized industries, or defending civil liberties of radicals. For forty years, labor students and sociologists have analyzed the causes of labor corruption. The most recent study (Philip Taft, *Corruption and Racketeering in the Labor Movement*, Ithaca, New York, 1958) comes to roughly the same conclusions as previous investigations: “Basically, racketeering in labor unions appears to flow from a general slackness in American society, an emphasis upon

material gain, and practices prevalent in many areas of the business community. . . . As employers in some trades will buy off inspectors, so they will make collusive bargains with a business agent." When American influence recently became marked in Western Germany, some of our labor mores apparently got transplanted, as well. "Labor representatives out of contact with their fellow workers and functioning as an organ of management on the codetermination boards have shown themselves avid spokesmen for the employers. The 'bonzen,' [bosses] as they are called, forgot their origins and became inordinately concerned with the problems of management." (pp. 33-34.)

But explanation is not justification. The labor movement has arisen not to mirror the corruptions and exploitations of our acquisitive society, but to eradicate them. To the extent that unionism succumbs to the practices of the business world, it loses its *raison d'être*. The very employers who make use of corrupt labor officials induce their political spokesmen to expose the corruption in order to discredit and undermine the labor movement. In the midst of the worst postwar depression, labor officials were preoccupied with undoing the damage of the McClellan exposures. It is startling how little was done by the government in ten months of depression to alleviate the plight of the unemployed and how ineffectual and tame was the response of this big labor movement. Its few feeble attempts at mass demonstrations turned into pep rallies for the Democrats. It proved helpless even to secure passage of its proposed improved unemployment compensation bill.

To sum up, the labor movement is not a leader in the nation today. It does not evoke an image as the protector of the underdog, the champion of progress, the advocate of the brotherhood of man. It is, in the mind of the general public, another "special interest."

But the unions have attained a numerical strength and a social weight where they can no longer limit themselves to their role of the past. Even if we assume that Gompers' narrow semi-syndicalist job-consciousness was the last word in statesmanship for a trade union movement of 1½ to 2 million, parceled out in craft jurisdictions, such a program is still unworkable for a labor movement of 18 million entrenched in the major industrial strongholds of the economy. Whatever historic role we assign the unions, whether the classic Marxist idea that they are the training grounds for socialist struggles, or the

current sociological theory that labor is one of the important "countervailing forces" in a pluralistic society, or the liberal conception that the labor movement is a key institution for safeguarding democracy in a slowly evolving society, we would have to conclude on the empirical evidence that the labor movement's moral standing is declining and that it is not making adequate use of its powers. C. Wright Mills called the labor leaders "the new men of power" in 1948. His recent conclusion in *The Power Elite* (New York, 1956) fits the facts more accurately: "For a brief time, it seemed that labor would become a power-bloc independent of Corporation and State but operating upon and against them. After becoming dependent upon the government system, however, the labor unions suffered rapid decline in power and now have little part in major national decisions. The United States now has no labor leaders who carry any weight of consequence in decisions of importance to the political outsiders now in charge of the visible government. . . . Well below the top councils, they are of the middle levels of power." (pp. 262-263.)

The result has been a working class pushed off its perch of the thirties and reduced again to a submerged layer of society. The working class has been kept reasonably contented, however, like the proletariat of the Roman Empire, with bread and circuses. While the union organizations have solidified themselves as bureaucratic edifices, the *élan* and glow have gone, and the outlook of the ranks has grown philistine.

The more understanding of the labor intellectuals who follow union events closely recognize this state of affairs. They deplore the shortcomings and derelictions and offer suggestions for improvement. But they feel that, realistically, one cannot demand very much more from trade unions than they are doing, that unions are a functional institutionalism in our society which by its nature cannot go beyond the specific job of rendering a business service. They hold that criticisms made from the assumption that labor ought to remake our society, or be a decision-maker in the existing society, are intrinsically utopian, corresponding neither to the temper of the country, nor the wishes of the union membership. It was this sober administrative realism that led Selig Perlman and the Wisconsin school in the twenties to embrace Gompers' brand of business unionism and to ridicule the radicals. It is this same outlook that motivated J. B. S. Hardman and

many labor experts in the forties and fifties to tailor their thinking to the existing labor movement.

An empirical approach is often very effective in describing the existing situation, or estimating a slowly modifying one. But it falls down in anticipating "leaps" and "crises" in a historical development (as David Herreshoff describes in his discussion of the Wisconsin school) and is poor at orienting itself in a fast-changing period. Even if an historical estimation contains errors, it is still more fruitful in furnishing a working hypothesis for purposes of long-range orientation and policy-planning than a merely descriptive sociology. Is this meant to suggest that the trade union movement will soon face a period of swift change as did the AFL in the early thirties? Or are the unions up against a typical round of difficulties, some of which will be eliminated by small modifications of their practices, and some of which are the usual problems that inevitably attend all organizations and human endeavors?

Beneath the general slough in labor affairs, a considerable organizational and power re-arrangement is now in progress. The unity of the AFL and CIO two years ago was a threadbare, formal affair. It was further compromised by the disproportionate weight of the AFL in the policy-making Executive Council, and the consequent submergence of the CIO, which had in the past been the more militant and democratic labor body, and which even in 1955 was the cleaner and more virile organization. But the CIO had little bargaining power. It was by that time less than half the size of its rival. The expulsion of the Communist-dominated unions had been part of the process of its loss of momentum. When afterwards, McDonald of the Steel Union started a clique battle against Walter Reuther of the Auto Workers, the CIO was in danger of disintegration and had to take the best terms available from the AFL. Inside the common federation, the industrial unions appeared to be facing an uphill journey. The crafts started to aggressively push their jurisdiction claims. The Teamsters were perfecting a series of private alliances with other unions. And the Teamster-Building Trades bloc was holding up unification of the main state and city bodies. It also seemed at the time that the employers and politicians were going to throw their influence behind the business unionists of the Beck-Hoffa stamp. (Witness the deal with Montgomery Ward, and Senator Goldwater's dec-



laration that he hoped Hoffa's philosophy would prevail against that of Walter Reuther.)

The McClellan Senatorial hearings transformed the picture. As an unforeseen by-product of the disclosures, the AFL-CIO hierarchy was driven to make far-reaching alterations in its internal dispositions. The Teamsters Union has been forced out of the federation. The other big wheel, the Carpenters, has its officers under a cloud as well as an indictment. The revolt of the Building Trades petered out at the 1957 Atlantic City convention; President Meany, resting on a new power bloc, told them off in words that no one would have dared employ two years ago. New, more effective machinery to arbitrate jurisdictional conflicts was subsequently adopted by the Executive Council, and under the whip of public scandalization, a degree of centralized power has been assumed which would never have been tolerated by the International chieftains in Gompers' day. The executive weight in labor's councils—for the time being at any rate—has shifted to a combination of the industrial unions and the semi-industrial AFL unions like the Machinists, Electricians, Railway Clerks.

The McClellan disclosures have forced through the adoption of the so-called ethical practices codes and the squeezing out of a number of the more compromised officials. The atmosphere around the labor movement is very different from the time when Joseph Fay slugged Dubinsky at the New Orleans AFL convention for the latter's speech against racketeering, and Dave Beck was the honored speaker at businessmen's luncheons. The unions are now under heavy pressure to clean up their more flagrant administrative abuses in order to be able to present a defensible front to the public. But the McClellan disclosures produced no revolts in the ranks. The men and women who pay the dues were voiceless. The reform was a purely top affair and therefore of restricted scope. The AFL-CIO leaders run bureaucratized organizations and had neither the capacity nor the desire to appeal to the ranks to stage internal revolts within their unions. Hence, they had no alternative course but to drop the recalcitrant unions and to sacrifice those union officials who had been caught red-handed. The cleanup campaign will eliminate a few crooked leaders and will institute some improved procedures, but the character, leadership, and direction of the present union movement

will be little altered; neither will it stop the decay or retreat. For that, other methods and forces are needed.

A basic redirection of union policies can be visualized only as a consequence of an insurgent mood sweeping the nation, and finding reflection in union ranks. It is hard to see the unions as initiators of such a change. They will, rather, be beneficiaries of it. Left to their own devices, the union officials will perpetuate themselves in office and continue to follow the lines of least resistance. But the mass mood has seesawed in the United States every few decades, and there is no reason to suppose that the pendulum will not swing again in the opposite direction from the present. The time intervals vary depending on a whole series of circumstances, but the oscillating process goes on.

Any new upheaval inside the unions will necessarily assume different forms from the upsurge of the thirties. The unionization wave that came with the NRA hit a predominantly unorganized and leaderless working class. The old set of AFL officials feared the mass production workers and were in any case unequipped to cope with the problems of mass unionism. They weren't even up to protecting their organizations' interests in the code setups, as the exasperated comments of Miss Perkins and other friendly New Dealers attest. Consequently, the political radicals were able to play a unique role in the early stages of unionization as they possessed the special skills that were at a premium at the time. They partially filled the existing vacuum of leadership. Now, however, the union movement is, in a technical sense, an excellently organized machine, and disposes of a wide network of skilled personnel. The present union officialdom constitutes a formidable bureaucratic power. New bodies of workers will be absorbed, as they are organized, into the existing organism (as they were in the more alert unions like the miners and women's and men's clothing workers in the early thirties) rather than form a rival power center, as did the CIO. Radicals will play an independent role inside the unions again to the extent that they represent the sentiments of sizable segments of union ranks. Their militancy and self-sacrifice will be appreciated as they were in the thirties. But they will be operating this time in a union movement headed by a seasoned and more socially flexible officialdom, and their technical skills may very well be inferior to those of the administration forces.

Such a trend is all the more likely because of the collapse of political radicalism in the fifties. There is no sizable cadre of men and women ready to step into the breach. At the time of the AFL-CIO merger, when there was talk of launching an ambitious organization campaign, *Fortune* magazine voiced skepticism that it would come off, and gave as one of its reasons the absence of a group of radicals able and willing to handle that kind of work. This same collapse of radicalism explains the absence of rank and file initiative in response to the McClellan exposures. It is the other side of the coin of the prevailing apathy in the unions, reflecting the listlessness in the nation at large.

Nowadays, labor writers ignore the essential tie-up between union democracy and radicalism, probably because radicalism is currently viewed by the academic community as something alien which intellectuals or fanatics seek artificially to inject into the bloodstream of the labor movement. There have, of course, been innumerable instances of radicalized intellectuals or intellectualized radical workers, seeking, in a wise or unwise manner, to influence conservative labor movements in the direction of their ideas. Such efforts have met at different times favorable as well as unfavorable responses, because radicalism and conservatism are varying aspects of the workers' aspirations for a better life under capitalism; now one, now the other, coming into prominence, depending on conditions. Both are endemic to the labor movement, as any reliable text of American labor history will quickly reveal. Radicalism, however, is intimately connected with union democracy for two special reasons.

First, internal union life becomes vibrant only when workers are in motion. In such times, the ranks are interested in alternative lines to official policy, and seek to participate in decision-making. This may lead them to break through, or attempt to break through, the bureaucratic crust. Ordinarily, union proceedings are pretty humdrum, and only a tiny part of the membership participates. The most recent study of a group of medium-size industrial local unions showed that attendance at meetings typically ranged from 2 to 6 percent. Naturally, controversies of any nature can excite the passions of the members and impart vigor to union proceedings. The existence of a two-party system and the waging of hard-fought election campaigns in the Typographical Union is a case in point. But it is an historical

fact that democratic participation and spirited controversy occur most commonly when the membership is in a militant state and anxious to realize substantial social objectives, or to change the union personnel, or both.

Second, a rank and file group is helpless when confronting an entrenched union administration unless it has leaders and some kind of organization. Even where the administration does not seek to apply pressures, threats, or sanctions against the dissidents, the democratic process is reduced to paltry and primitive proportions where its implementation depends on a scattering of unconnected individuals who attempt to pit their proposals against those of a well-oiled machine commanding all the resources of office. That is why when union ranks are in upheaval and seriously resolved to enforce changes, they inevitably throw up new leaders from their midst and form at least some kind of rudimentary caucuses or working groups. Where upheavals spread through a number of unions, and reflect broader social issues rather than passing grievances of a strictly local union nature, such native union radicalism tends to fuse, to one extent or another, with political radicalism—whatever the precise mechanism by which the fusion is realized.

Sociologists have analyzed the process by which a labor union becomes conservatized as it gains responsibilities and power, how the agitator of yesterday becomes the bureaucrat of today, and how a fighting membership settles down when it wins some improvements in its work conditions. This evolution is by now a familiar story and has been repeated in the trade unions of every country in the Western world. Within severe limitations, Michels' "law of oligarchy" operates with fidelity. But the life cycle of the labor movement does not end with the conservatization and bureaucratization of once militant and democratic movements. Capitalism does not furnish labor unions with that kind of a stable foundation. New crises arise, which breed new upheavals, and start a new cycle—at times, on a higher basis. The American labor movement didn't get fixed for eternity, or even for a very long time, with Gompers' triumph over the Knights of Labor. And the present AFL-CIO, stemming from the New Deal, is not the last word on the subject, either. But today's absence of radical ginger groups around unions, and the prostration of organized radicalism, means that new moods of insurgency will find expression

more slowly. It will take more time for the ranks to throw up new spokesmen. Internal union changes will rest for some time to come in the hands of the present officialdom, sections of it reflecting at times progressive currents.

Over forty years ago, John R. Commons wrote: "It doubtless has appealed to some people who consider the employer's position more powerful than that of the union, that the employer should be compelled in some way to deal with unions, or at least to confer with their representatives. But if the State recognizes any particular union by requiring the employer to recognize it, the State must necessarily guarantee the union to the extent that it must strip it of any abuses it may practice." (U.S. Commission On Industrial Relations, *Final Report*, Washington, 1915, p. 374.)

These remarks have a prophetic ring today. During the New Deal, labor officials started to lean on government boards and depend on government mediation machinery. The CIO officials embraced the alliance without qualm or inhibition. The AFL hesitated for a few brief moments, but soon forgot old Sam Gompers' admonition that "what they give, they can take away," and followed suit. The labor leaders have grown accustomed to using crutches and their walking limbs have atrophied. When the government turned its scowling side on the labor movement and passed the Taft-Hartley law, John L. Lewis proposed that the unions bypass the law and rely on their economic strength. But the labor hierarchs found this too strong meat for their stomachs. They decided to live with the law. The unions are now enmeshed in a tangle of legal regulations, NLRB rulings, and court decisions, which have made unionism a happy hunting ground for lawyers. With each new decision, the unions sink deeper into the quagmire of legalistic red tape and restrictive regulation. The hiring of more lawyers, more statisticians, more lobbyists, is not the unmixed blessing that many labor writers imagine. It is by no means exclusively a sign of maturity. Up to a point, it is the inevitable concomitant of big unionism dealing with vast corporations and a swollen government bureaucracy. But it also testifies, in part, to the flabbiness of labor unions which have permitted themselves to be sucked into the maw of Taft-Hartleyism, and have consequently surrendered a part of their hard-won independence. Whatever be the fate of the new batch of laws now before Congress

and the state legislatures, this is a process which will most likely continue and deepen, given the forces at play on both sides.

The unions are not only caught in the coils of government regulation, but will time and again be faced with punitive edicts which will represent real dangers to their functioning and interfere with their growth. That is why the impulse to enlarge their political influence will grow with each new harassment. The authors of the Taft-Hartley law feared such a reaction and tried to forestall labor politics with crude proscriptions. But labor is strong enough to surmount these and future obstacles thrown in its path if it has the will to political power. Very likely, labor's political experimentations will eventually culminate with the establishment of some kind of labor party. Whatever its institutional form, however, it appears to be labor's manifest destiny to emerge on the political scene in another decade with at least the comparable effectiveness of its British cousins.

The process gives every indication of proceeding along the lines of slow, ponderous change—except for the fact that United States capitalism, as the twentieth century empire builder, is caught in a crisis of monumental proportions, and absorbs the crisis of every part of the so-called free world within its own system. What the precise impact of the crisis will be on the labor unions is difficult to gauge. A lot depends on the economic situation at home. An armaments prosperity bolstered by credit buying has up to now acted as a powerful soporific, effectively doping the working people and nestling intellectuals in clouds of euphoria. But the recent depression is breaking the hypnosis. It is not the maintenance of any special level of living standard that determines the political mood. Given a certain minimum level, it is the feeling of security that makes for conservatism and acquiescence, and the feeling of uncertainty that provokes anxiety and impatience. Because the unions are being pushed irrevocably into the volatile sphere of politics, they will react with increasing sensitivity to coming atmospheric disturbances. And the signs point to a stormy decade ahead.







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BERT COCHRAN, Editor

THIS collection of essays on the American labor movement supplies what so many have been looking for: a reasoned approach to the problems of labor, a concise summary of its place in the larger social scheme of the country, and an analysis of its development in the framework of our recent history. In short, the book answers the question, "What does it all add up to?"

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## THE EDITOR

BERT COCHRAN was one of the pioneers of auto unionism. He was associated with the late Matthew Smith in the Mechanics Educational Society of America, the first union in the automobile industry organized during the NRA days, and served as the organization's General Organizer. He led a fusion of the Ohio section of the MESA with the CIO Auto Union in 1936 and was an International official of the latter union for a number of years. He has edited a wide variety of labor papers, and is presently an editor of the *American Socialist*.

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